

## Memories of Dr. Richard Francis Weymouth.

A FEW months ago I was called to preach Special Anniversary Sermons at the Baptist Church in Brentwood. With the exception of Hutton and Southend, Essex had been "off my map" during long years. I was glad, after a long interval, to return to Brentwood, mainly because of certain very happy memories of the town. My diary informs me that it is exactly forty years since I gave a "Mission" in the town, a Mission memorable for me, and for very many in Brentwood. The whole place was stirred. Forty years afterwards, men and women in mid-life, and some more advanced in age, came to tell me that the Mission meant for them a new beginning in life. That, I think, was the most impressive thing, and the most humbling, in connection with the visit last Fall. I shall remember it also because of the interruptions during the service, due to an unpleasant visit from Hitler's company of raiders. To see a solid body of soldiers rise up and leave the church in the middle of the service, at the voice of the sirens, was a new experience for me. There was a happy compensation, however, when, after the "all clear" was sounded, many of these men returned to the church to hear the second part of the sermon. I shook hands with all these soldiers, knowing that by their action they had proved themselves to be men of conviction, and not robots who had come to a "parade" service.

But there was another memory I brought with me from Brentwood. More than once my eye had caught sight of a memorial tablet on the wall near the door. When I examined it my heart leapt, for I read upon it the name of one whom I revered, that of Dr. Richard Francis Weymouth, once Headmaster of Mill Hill School, known in that capacity to a few, but now known all over the world as a scholar to whom we are indebted for a remarkably fine translation of the New Testament into modern English. It would be invidious to make comparisons. There was one similar translation before the "Weymouth" appeared, and there have been several since. But Weymouth still stands alone on account of its excellent English. There are no vulgarisms in it, and modern idioms are reduced to the minimum. Unprejudiced critics have always admired it for this reason. Nothing like the "be off with you" of certain versions appears in Weymouth. I greatly like Moffatt and Torrey and

Goodspeed, but Weymouth has a place all its own. And it is not likely to be displaced, although it may yet be revised so as to include the remarkable changes in the meaning of words which were revealed to us by Adolf Deismann and others who had studied the newly discovered papyri.

However, this is not the place to discuss these matters. I am writing mainly about Dr. Weymouth himself.

Another glance at my old diary reveals the fact that it is exactly fifty years since I first met Dr. Weymouth. It was a decisive date for me. On that Sunday morning there began a personal friendship between us which endured until the day of his departure from this life. I was nearing the end of my first pastorate of five years, and on the eve of coming to London as one of the workers in the newly established "Forward Movement." Dr. Clifford and Dr. Meyer pressed me to undertake this work, and gave me a place as preaching "Missioner" on my own lines as "Apologist" for the faith. A preliminary engagement took me to preach at Acton, then a delightful suburb. I remember the occasion as if it were but yesterday. I was a little nervous. I knew that certain people, who were not quite sure of my "orthodoxy," were coming to "try me out." I did not care very much what they thought, but I know that such people do not usually introduce into a service of worship the best devotional atmosphere. When, therefore, I saw before me in the gallery facing the pulpit a distinguished looking man, leaning forward so as not to miss a word (apparently), I thought, "there is one of them." The mood soon passed, for I saw that the man was deeply interested, and he began to inspire me. The text of the sermon was, "When Jesus entered Jerusalem all the city was moved." The result of that service was that the same text was used half a dozen times afterwards to inaugurate an "apologetic" campaign. Ministers will guess easily how the theme was treated.

To my astonishment, at the close of the service, the gallery hearer came to me, offered his card, and announced that I was to be his guest at luncheon. So began my friendship with Dr. Weymouth. During the afternoon he broached the question of my "orthodoxy"—I remember still how, with his Greek New Testament open, he discoursed upon the real meaning of the word *aiwnios*. Later, he sent me an autographed copy of his *Resultant Greek Testament*, a greatly prized gift. And when I was attacked in two "religious" papers, he wrote two letters to these journals warmly defending me. Imagine what these meant to a young fellow of twenty-eight, on the threshold of his career! The attack ceased at once. There is no need to refer to our later correspondence which, on his side, was always

generous. He became to me a true "father in God." The last time I met him was at Brentwood, where he had gone to reside. "Come and cheer up an old man," he wrote. I spent an afternoon with him, and remained for dinner *à deux*. The meal over, he took me into his sanctum, opened a safe, and withdrew from it a beautifully bound book containing a number of letters from some of the most distinguished scholars in the world. They all referred to his special work. Then—I can never forget it—he opened, with tenderness, a packet of MSS. It was his famous translation of the New Testament. He read extracts from it, and offered his reasons for the wording. One of these stands out. The Authorised Version makes the elder brother say to his father, "All these years have I been *serv*ing you"; Weymouth rendered it: "all these years have I been *slav*ing for you." The emphasis with which he read it! The bitterness he imported into the sentence! One could see that elder boy, vomiting forth his pent up hatred of the life at the farm. His heart had been all along with his young rascal of a brother, who had lived a gay life "far away" (at Rome?). Since there is no mention of a woman in the story, the mother was probably dead, and there was no sister. The two men, father and son, were alone, and the son resented it. "I've been slaving for you all these years . . ." Dr. Weymouth is the only modern translator who, *in this passage*, rendered *doulos* by "slave," although in the Revised Version it is so rendered in other passages, e.g., "Paul a slave of Jesus Christ." But Dr. Weymouth defended it as more in accord with the spirit of the scene than the milder "serve" suggests. When, however, the original Weymouth was revised by Professor J. A. Robertson, "slave" was replaced by "serve." Whenever I read Weymouth in public I always use his original rendering of this passage. It is not only more dramatic, it also best expresses the venom that this young man emitted.

When he had finished, he tied up the parcel tenderly, and then, placing his hands on my shoulder, said, "I've spent years over this, but I fear it will never see the light; the financial difficulties are too great." For a moment he was silent, and I saw tears in his eyes. They were contagious. He added slowly, "It has been done for His glory, and He knows."

In a few minutes I was on my way to Blackheath, where I lived. It was the last time we met, yet the passing of the years has not dimmed the memory of that sacred scene.

The book *did* see the light. It has had an amazing circulation, and it is highly prized by those who use it. I read "Moffatt" regularly, but I like to check him by Weymouth. Impudent? Perhaps! But that is my affair.

Mr. Herbert Marnham, an old Millhillian, told me how the

book came to be published. He and a few more of the old school who knew of the existence of the MSS. undertook to finance its publication. The rest is history.

I am glad to be able, at the request of the Editor, to offer this tribute, poor though it be, to a great man, who was great enough to befriend a youngster at a moment when some would have torn him to pieces. And to continue that friendship to the very end.

One day, I hope, a place may be found in the Church House for some memorial to one who did much for his own denomination, but far more for the whole Church of God.

FREDERIC C. SPURR.

EDITORIAL FOOTNOTE.—The following appears in the Jubilee Volume of the Acton Church (*Fifty Years in a London Suburb*, by E. J. Tongue, B.A., B.D.).

“While Dr. Weymouth is justly famous throughout Christendom as the author of ‘The New Testament in Modern Speech’—a rendering of the New Testament into the language of the educated man of to-day—the Church at Acton had the opportunity of seeing him at his own fireside. He was received by transfer from the Congregational Church at Mill Hill, in December, 1886, and within a month was elected a Deacon. He proved to be, not only an eminent New Testament scholar, but a very versatile worker. For nearly five years he remained in fellowship with the Church, and during that time was preacher at the Mission Stations, Conductor of the Young Women’s Bible Class on Sunday afternoon, besides being the Leader of the Choir for two years, the Treasurer of the Building Fund, and a Trustee. He also held a Class for Bible study at his own home on alternate Wednesday afternoons. His views as to the Scripturalness and the wisdom of appointing *permanent* Deacons were not accepted by the Church, but his consecrated ability and willing service never failed to be duly honoured.”