

One man fears some alteration of the ornaments rubric which will affect his particular interpretation of its mysteries ; another cannot sacrifice his peculiar fad about the use or disuse of the Athanasian Creed ; a third fears that his opponents may secure some triumph ; others are pining for the moment when reversion to 1549 or 1552 or to the Scotch book may be possible. The time has come when the parish clergy—who do the work, and not the controversy, of the Church—must make their voice heard. They are passionately desirous to be loyal, but they must have greater freedom if their work is to be efficient. Their wants are clear and command general assent. Let them put aside the controversial points and concentrate on their most flagrant needs. Then the great enrichment which God has vouchsafed to our life in Church and State will find its counterpart in the enrichment of our splendid heritage of the Book of Common Prayer.



### The Real Difficulty of Preaching.

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PROBABLY nothing is more criticized than the weekly sermon, and yet in nothing is the criticism more ineffective. The reason lies on the surface : the criticism hardly ever reaches the ears of the one principally concerned. Herein lies one, at least, of the real difficulties of preaching, and a crucial difference between the work of the preacher and that of every other profession. Speakers, writers, and artists of all kinds have abundant opportunity of discovering what their fellow-men really think of their productions. They see reviews of their books or pictures ; friends and even acquaintances have little scruple in offering advice and criticism. The public speaker soon learns from the Press and those around him whether he is a "failure" or not. And again, there is the tangible test of commercial success. Is

the last book selling better than its predecessors? What are the offers for the picture in the Academy? How do this year's briefs compare with last year's?

Of course, no one imagines that either of these tests is infallible or ultimate. Neither contemporary criticism nor commercial success is a sure index to the real value of a man's work; if he is wise he largely discounts them both. None the less, within limits, they offer real guidance and assistance, particularly to the average member of his profession. He learns to avoid mannerisms; he finds out how far he is making himself intelligible to his audience, and how far he is in touch with the thought of his age. He may, of course, deliberately refuse to be so, and prefer to work for posterity or a very limited circle; if so, he has his reasons, sufficient for himself, and he knows what he is doing. But few ordinary writers would deny that they owe much to criticism of one sort or another.

But the preacher—at any rate, in the Anglican Communion! In his first curacy he will receive from his lady friends copious eulogiums on his earliest efforts. If he is fortunate, he will have a Vicar who will give him more discriminating advice and criticism. But as time goes on he finds that all this ceases. Particularly if his lot fall in a country parish, he will go on preaching sermon after sermon without the least idea of their effect or of the impression he has made on his congregation. He will probably try different styles, the written or very carefully prepared, the really *ex tempore*, or even conversational. He will in turn be expository, doctrinal, or practical. He will experiment with literary allusions or popular anecdotes, with courses of lectures on the Bible or Prayer-Book, with up-to-date sermons on current topics.

In all this the preacher may be sincerely anxious simply to find out what helps his people most. He soon gets beyond the stage of hoping to be a Liddon or of looking on sermons as a means of reputation and advancement. His one aim may be the good of his flock, and as a means to that

he knows he must interest them, appeal to their imagination and conscience, and use language which they will understand and remember. But he is quickly pulled up short, because he is left almost entirely without indication as to what has really told. He hears no criticism, favourable or unfavourable, and except in the case of the written sermon, he cannot even recapture the spoken word, so as to give it the benefit of his own criticism later on.

Happy man if he has a candid critic in his wife! It is one of the arguments in favour of the marriage of the clergy that there shall be someone to perform this useful function. And perhaps an occasional visitor or relative will delight the parson's heart with a word of approval or a timid suggestion. But in these cases the personal equation is too strong to make the criticism of much value. The critics move in the clerical entourage; their education and way of looking at things will be much the same as the preacher's; further, it is very hard to give an unbiassed opinion on the work of one whom one knows intimately from within; we read too much between the lines of the sermon. What we need is to know the effect produced on the average member of our congregation, on the man of business, the mother or servant girl, the factory hand or the farm labourer. They only know the preacher from without, and do not move in the ecclesiastical circle. How does the Sunday sermon fit in with their daily life and the normal line of their thought? Do we assume too much knowledge; do we really help them? How very seldom the preacher knows this! He catches, perhaps, an occasional hint in his visiting; he may hear sometimes from a sick parishioner how words of years ago have found their way to his heart or conscience. But generally speaking he remains in the dark Sunday after Sunday, and has not the least indication as to whether his preaching is improving (*i.e.*, helping his people more), or which of the lines on which he has experimented are best worth pursuing.

Perhaps this will be disputed. We are told that we have the obvious test of the growth or diminution of our congregations.

Only very seldom is this test worth much. It applies to the extremes. The very good preacher—the born orator—finds that he is quite evidently filling his church. The very bad preacher is faced and depressed by the sight of visibly emptying pews. And this will particularly be the case in towns where parochial boundaries count for little and there is a choice of churches. But with the average incumbent of a country parish the test is almost valueless. Probably of all the factors which make for good or bad attendance the sermon is the least important, unless it falls under one or other of the extremes. If the preacher is very long, very dull, and very inaudible, his flock may stay away. If he is very acceptable, a few may come more readily than they would otherwise have done. But we are speaking of the average man; in his case, though the sermon may be made the excuse for non-attendance, it is probably very seldom the reason.

Again, there is the further test of which we hear so much—the mysterious *rapport* between speaker and audience. It is said that there is always a certain bond of sympathy, a something in the air, which will tell us whether we are holding our congregation. No doubt this is partly true, and again particularly in the extreme cases. A man of tact and sympathy can perhaps generally tell when he has preached a specially interesting or dull sermon. But probably the temper of mind of the preacher himself has far more to do with this supposed *rapport* than is generally realized. He is deeply moved and interested himself, and attributes the same feelings to his audience. Or he is out of sorts and dispirited, and fancies that no one has listened to a word he has said. In each case he may be quite wrongly transferring his own mood to his congregation. No doubt Horace's recipe for the production of tears may be quoted, and it is perfectly true that the absence of sincerity is fatal to any speaker. But the converse does not hold good, that everyone who does feel sincerely can depend on imparting his feelings to his audience; nor is the preacher's own mood or impression an infallible test of his hearers'. And

is the attitude of the audience always a certain criterion? The man sitting bolt upright, with his eyes glued to your face, may be far away in thought, or may be counting for a bet the number of times you make use of a pet phrase. And the other, never looking at you, and fidgeting aimlessly with his hymn-book, may be taking in every syllable, and unconsciously bearing witness by his unrest to the penetrating power of the two-edged sword of the word of God.

No doubt, when all deductions have been made, the test of sympathy is a true one, and its value grows with experience. But the cry of many preachers is that they want something more definite. We ask that the laity should be ready to speak to us, to praise or to criticize. We do not want enthusiastic eulogiums from those kind-hearted but embarrassing admirers (feminine gender, please) who insist on seeing in the mediocrity of their parish priest the genius of a modern Savonarola; nor are we covetous of the flattery of people with an axe to grind. "Oh, sir, you did give us a *beautiful* sermon last Sunday night!" often means that the speaker hopes to find in the parson a relieving officer who makes no inquiries. This sort of thing we ignore. And there are other types of criticism more valuable in themselves, but too trivial to get to the root of the matter. We are asked for the source of a quotation, or challenged as to a fact or the pronunciation of a word. We want something more. We ask that the laity should cease to think it bad form to discuss the sermon to the parson's face, instead of behind his back.

Readers of Ian Maclaren's "St. Jude's" will remember a most life-like example of the inadequacy of the preacher's own impression of himself, and of the useful part played by the advice of the Elders of the Scotch Church. Might we not look for something of the sort from our own churchwardens and leading workers?

Of course, the custom would have its dangers. We must beware of becoming weathercocks, following the wind of popular taste; nor are we to preach only what our people like

to hear : to prophesy smooth things is to prophesy deceit. The question is not so much of the substance of the sermon as of its form. We ask for the encouragement which would come if we could know that our people had at least thought about what we had said, and considered it worth talking over with us. And we ask for some indications of what really interests and appeals to the varying types of mind with which we have to deal. It is for us to use those indications wisely, and by the light they give to learn more of the mysterious art of "persuasion." We ask for criticism, not that we may win more praise, but that we may do more good.



## The Anglican Idea of a True Episcopate.

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THE question of episcopacy is a burning one at the present time, but heat is not always accompanied by light, and controversy is a slow and cumbrous method of arriving at the truth ; for that reason there is need for men to clear their minds upon such a question, and formulate a position which will bear the strictest investigation. Such an attempt is made in this paper, which lays no claim to originality, but simply endeavours to restate the reasonable assertions of the Anglican communion with regard to her ministry.

In the first place, a clear distinction must be drawn between the fact of the episcopate and the various theories which have been held with regard to it. Different theories may be held with regard to the nature of the office, but these theories are but explanations of an already existing fact ; that fact is the same under varying conditions, and whatever explanation we may find of its origin or nature should be applicable to the fact wherever found, and conversely the explanation must take in all the essential features of the fact if it is to be satisfactory.