

PROFESSOR MARCUS DODS.

You have only to look at Dr. Dods' face to see that he is not the kind of man who likes to sit for his portrait. His frame has the build and strength of an oak, but the nature is shade-loving as the maiden-hair. Yet his fame this month is on every tongue in connexion with an event which has a wider significance than the personal honour to him; and though he shall *not* sit for his portrait, the few things which his literary friends in *THE EXPOSITOR* have almost the right to know shall be briefly told.

Quarter of a century ago, in reviewing his first original book, *The Prayer that Teaches to Pray*, a reviewer apologised for one who bore a name so "antique, Roman, and recognisable" venturing into a field where his father, Marcus Dods the elder, was widely known and honoured, and held that it bound over the son "continually to emulate one who dedicated the highest powers to the highest purposes."

"A MAN OF NOBLE POWERS
NOBLY USED
IN WHOM MEMORY AND JUDGMENT,
VIGOUR AND GENTLENESS,
GRAVITY AND WIT,
EACH SINGLY EXCELLENT,
WERE ALL HAPPILY COMBINED
AND EVER DEVOTED
WITH EQUAL PROMPTITUDE AND PERSEVERANCE
TO THE LABOURS OF CHRISTIAN GODLINESS
AND THE DEEDS OF HUMAN KINDNESS."

So begins the epitaph—one of the noblest in the English tongue—hidden among the Northumbrian hills, which recalls to the present generation the author of *The Incarnation of the Word*, and reveals the impress and quality of character handed down by a mysterious, and in this case unerring, heredity to the subject of this note. Even to the

detailed features of his ministry, the son seems but to have reproduced the minister of Belford's life, for as we read on we learn how—

“THE DELIGHT OF HIS HOUSEHOLD,
THE FATHER OF HIS FLOCK,
THE HELPER OF THE POOR,
HE CAPTIVATED HIS FRIENDS BY HIS RICH CONVERSE
AND EDIFIED THE CHURCH
BY HIS LEARNED AND ELOQUENT PEN.”

And, still more prophetic, how this best of ministers also lived

“TO ADVANCE AND DEFEND.”

On the death of his father, which occurred when he was four years old, Dr. Dods' mother exchanged the Belford manse for a home in Edinburgh, the family living, after the first year or two, in the well-known house built by Allan Ramsay on the top of the Castle Rock. Inconsistent with the traditions of the Gentle Shepherd, this poet's bower had for pleasure-ground the beetling precipices of the Castle, and the perilous playground was fully taken advantage of by Marcus and his companions, and became the scene of many an escapade. Dr. Dods recalls these early days now with infinite delight, for they were spent just as boys should spend them, with much exercise of manliness and muscle and not too excessive anxiety over Ovid and Euclid. On leaving the Academy, the boy was entrusted by his mother to the friendly manager of one of the Edinburgh banks; but as she secretly cherished the wish that her son should one day enter the profession of his father, she succeeded in arranging that he should be allowed to leave the bank if necessary without completing the usual term of apprenticeship. On the expiry of the second year, though he “never thought himself good enough” to be a minister, the lad allowed himself to be enrolled at the University of

Edinburgh; and in spite of the long interruption to his studies, passed out of it in the usual course of four years with an honourable degree.

About this time the scholarly tendencies inherited from his father began to gain sway over his mind, and henceforth it was always as the scholar that he was marked off from his fellow students. So great an ascendancy indeed did the intellectual habit attain in his nature, that when, four years later, he emerged from the prolonged theological course required for the Presbyterian ministry, it became a problem with his friends whether a man of his great learning and grave and silent mood would readily gain that popular recognition which is essential to secure a place in a Church where vacant charges are filled by the vote of the people. This fear unfortunately was too well founded. It has been a rebuke to the Church, and a solace to many an unhappy "probationer" since, that a man like Dr. Marcus Dods should have begged at the door of Churches, throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, for six long years without finding a people to discover his worth. The inner history, the hopes and fears, the searching discipline, of these years we leave to be imagined. Twenty-three distinct chances of more or less attractive charges were within his reach, and twenty-three times he lost. On many of these occasions his name was among the two or three highest candidates, and on nearly all of them a few men of judgment and insight pressed his claims on their fellow members with real enthusiasm; but the rank and file of the congregation never saw past a massiveness of thought which they mistook for heaviness, or a sustained momentum of appeal dependent on the very truth itself, which they construed into passionlessness and indifference. It is a superfluous comment upon this early neglect to add that, though Dr. Dods' pulpit style and delivery have changed in no essential respect with time, he has lived to be re-

garded by many competent judges as the very foremost preacher in his Church.

The characteristics of Dr. Dods' preaching, nevertheless, are not of the popular order, and to himself it has always been the mystery, not why he should have remained so long in obscurity, but why any average congregation should have at last run the risk of calling him. When it is remembered that in the eyes of Presbyterian Christendom a chronic probationer is the meanest of created things; when it is understood that his worn bag with its two "dried tongues" is the jest even of the railway porters, that his successive failures are known to every beadle in the land, that as the churchless years go by he becomes the shunned of sessions, the despised of presbyteries, the despair of ecclesiastics, one is lost in admiration at the audacity and faith of Renfield Church, Glasgow, in taking to its large arms the disheartened residuum of three and twenty vacancies.

Great was its discernment and great its reward. His first and only charge, he has remained loyal to it for quarter of a century; and though preferment of the most tempting kind has repeatedly and urgently been offered to him, he has held to the people who first recognised his worth, and lavished upon them the whole fruits of his life. No pastor and people were ever more closely or happily welded together than Dr. Dods to his congregation at Renfield; and the magnificent testimonial given him two months ago on the celebration of his semi-jubilee was the expression of an admiration and a friendship which have never been broken for an hour. What to Glasgow at large the Renfield pulpit has been during that long period it is hard to exaggerate. Men knew that, with whatever sufficiency or insufficiency of knowledge and of insight the gospel of Christ was being proclaimed in the land, there from Sunday to Sunday stood and spoke a man who knew Christianity in all its length and breadth, who faced its deepest problems without fear,

who evaded no difficulty, who kept nothing back, yet whose faith was positive, whose voice was certain, whose creed was weighted with realities and verities, and whose message came home to all honest hearts with a practical effect most irresistible and solemn. The mere fact of such a preacher doing such work was a tower of strength to the community. This preacher spake with authority, because he spake what he was daily finding out for himself. Seekers after truth discovered that here was one whose method they could respect, whose moral and intellectual instrument could be relied upon, who founded truth upon the nature of things, who *must* therefore become their teacher and their prophet, for he satisfied in rational ways their intellectual needs, and fed their spiritual hunger with bread which really nourished them.

The key-note of Dr. Dods' preaching is its reality. What he said in effect to his congregation in his first sermon has remained his ideal throughout: "You all know the truth from your infancy. You do not feel it. The work of the pulpit is to make it real to you." To make it real, Dr. Dods uses no other weapon than the truth itself. Artifice he has none; rhetoric would spoil the kind of work he does; eloquence, in the ordinary sense, is without his reach; even literary embellishment and ornament, though within his reach as within the reach of few men, he will not use unless he cannot help it. He stands squarely in the pulpit, without either visible motion or emotion, reads his sermon from start to finish without a pause, begins without awakening any sense of expectation, gives no hint throughout of either discovery or originality, however much the discourse may teem with both, passes at a pace which never changes, in a voice without passion, or pathos, or cadence, or climax, through each of the half-dozen massive paragraphs of which every sermon is composed, and finishes bluntly when the last thing has been said, as if he were now

well out of it for the week. But on thinking it over when you go home, you perceive that the after result is almost in proportion to the unconsciousness of the effect at the time. You know exactly why the sermon stopped just then: there was nothing more to be said, the proof was final. You perceive why the great omission, which annoyed you at the time, was made: the thing you waited for was not in the text. You understand why one position was hopelessly irreconcilable with another position you held when you entered the church: because that other position was not true. You do not question now that it was not true, you *see* it to be untrue. You discover easily why the appeal did not move you more. You have been accustomed to the sounds of passion vibrating in the chords of another's soul. Now your own soul seethes and trembles. These effects are not the work of a man. They are the operations of the Spirit of truth. You know at last why the man was so hidden, why he had no cunning phrases, why beautiful words do not linger in your memory, why a preacher so impersonal, and to whom you were so impersonal, a preacher so wholly uninterested in you, so innocent himself of taking you by the throat, has yet taken his subject by the throat and planted it down before your inmost being, so that you cannot be rid of it. You know that you have heard no brilliant or awakening oratory, but you feel that you have been searched and overawed, that unseen realities have looked you in the eyes, and asked you questions, and made you a more humble and a more obedient man.

This is Dr. Dods as a preacher. As an expositor or lecturer his strength lies in an extraordinary fidelity to the theme, text, or object in hand. To the uninitiated this seems at first an almost narrowing fidelity; yet, as you soon discover, it is not determined by ignorance of the range of his subject, but depends on the very exactness of his knowledge of it, and of all parallel fields. Without

ever turning into them, you feel as you go along that he has been down every difficulty along the road, has heard all possible suggestions, been tempted by all available compromises, knows all that the guidebooks have said and that all previous travellers have seen and heard. His expository work hitherto has been obscured by the homiletical necessities of his ministry, but in the chair of New Testament exegesis to which he has just been called his great analytical gift and his exceptional knowledge of the literature and languages of the Bible will find their fitting sphere.

The evidence that reality and a certain intellectual honesty and fidelity have been the characteristics of Dr. Dods' public work is manifested, among other things, by two widely different circumstances—the success of his children's sermons, and the charges of heresy which from time to time have fallen upon him. One cannot talk to children without being real; and one cannot be called a heretic without being honest. As to the first, Dr. Dods' monthly talks to children were perhaps the most prominent, and certainly the most delightful, feature of his later ministry; and as for the second, but that there is so little in it, one would pass it over in silence. On three distinct occasions the cry of heretic has been raised against Dr. Dods. Whether just or unjust, this is never a comfortable thing; and though such charges must be sometimes necessary, both for the relief of conscience and the protection of truth, it is surely one of the cruellest features of the strained theological situation, not only that a public man takes his life in his hands every time he opens his lips, but that he is liable to have his influence marred and his spirit troubled for years by any spark of suspicion regarding him that may be idly dropped on the combustible elements of religious intolerance. It is a warning, to those at least who judge without knowledge and attack without charity, that nothing has been secured by any of the onslaughts

upon Dr. Dods, except the stirring up of bitterness in the Church, the further emphasis and dissemination of the truths attacked, and the wounding of a spirit which has met even the meanest of its enemies without impatience, anger, or disrespect. The first and most cruel blow fell when the needy probationer, after years of disappointed hopes, was on the very eve of settlement in Glasgow. The presbytery met in Renfield Church to moderate in his call, when a member of the congregation "rose and referred to a rumour which had come from Edinburgh of Mr. Dods being unsound on the Sabbath question." On the ground of this mere "rumour," though it was proved at the time to be absolutely baseless, the young minister in the eyes of part of the community was suffered to begin his life-work under reproach and cloud. Several years later the formal charge against him was of rationalistic views on the subject of inspiration, and this was disposed of in his favour by the General Assembly. Revived again in connection with the now famous paper read before the Pan-Presbyterian Council in London, the same charge formed the basis of a determined opposition on the part of some to his recent election to the Edinburgh chair. The view current even among many of Dr. Dods' friends and apologists with regard to this latest "heresy" is, that, though based on truth, and possibly capable of harmless explanation, his statements to the London Council were hasty, rash, and injudicious. But it is idle for us to seek to shelter him under any such plea. The views expressed in London, so far from being hasty and rash, embodied the most calm and serious convictions of his life. In uttering them, he followed the usual canon of his intellect, and stated them with rigid nakedness and impartiality, scorning—as speaking to a professional audience, he deemed it right to do—collateral confessions of his faith, and dispensing with those qualifications which he would have

introduced in addressing a more popular assembly. But to explain away his clearly defined position with regard to inspiration by suggestions of crudeness, rashness, or haste, is wholly to misunderstand the man, and to minimise a truth which it has been one of his life-aims to investigate, to prove, and to press home to his generation.

That he has succeeded in this attempt, after the remarkable scene in the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland on the 28th of last May, there can remain no doubt whatever. The battle that was then fought was the battle of inspiration: the battle of an untenable and even mischievous and doubt-provoking dogma, as opposed to a theory consistent at once with the absolute sacredness and inviolable inspiration of the Word of God and with all His methods of revealing Himself to man. And when two hundred ministers and one hundred and eighty-three elders affirmed the vote which placed Dr. Dods in the professor's chair, it was declared that henceforth his view of this cardinal doctrine should not only be allowed in the Church but taught. Dr. Dods himself, wandering among the Swiss Alps, and ignorant even that that was the day of election, had he been present to witness the event, would have felt it not the least reward of his life to discover the share he had unconsciously taken in effecting the greatest theological revolution in his Church's history. For while part of that success was due to his personality, by far the greater part must be assigned to the quiet leaven of his teaching, gradually working through sermons and books and men, and changing, to a degree anticipated by no one, the theological thought and temper of his Church. Many others, of course, and by similar methods, contributed to the theological result; but as circumstances gave it to him to lead his party to victory, they will continue to look to him to help them to use it wisely, and, without exultation or haste, to press onward to all needed progress.

It were an entire mistake however to gather that Dr. Dods' life has been a controversial one. On the contrary, it has been almost wholly spent in the undisturbed routine of the ministry, and in the seclusion of literary and family life. Taking his part in the philanthropies and institutions of his city, building a mission church, teaching his Bible-classes, keeping up his prayer-meeting, preaching anniversary sermons—these and his pulpit preparation make up the real sum of his twenty-five years' life in Glasgow. Of the wider ministry of his books there remains scarcely room to speak. But to omit the literary reference in Dr. Dods' case would be to ignore at least one half of his life's interest. The love of literature has been the one great passion of his life. All books, and all about books: reading books, and buying books, and writing books, and reviewing books, and editing books—these are to him meat and drink. The prodigality of Dr. Dods' contributions to literature is seldom realized. He has always been writing books, and he always will be writing books. It is in the family, and he cannot help it. Both his sisters—one, Marcia, the authoress of *Molly Dent*; the other, Mrs. Wilson, of Glenluce, the writer of many able articles, and translator of Tissot's *Switzerland*—caught the same infection from their father, and, fortunately for the world, it seems an incurable disease. Charles Wesley complains in his diary that he fell from his horse and was sore injured, "which prevented me writing hymns *till next day*." One is alarmed to think of the consequences to Dr. Dods if he were denied his favourite blue-grey quarto and broad-nibbed pen for two successive mornings. Before he was well out of college his translation of Augustine appeared, and shortly afterward, unable to contain himself even till he got a Church to lend a fulcrum to his authorship, the book on the Lord's Prayer was given to the press. Volume after volume on Old and New Testament subjects followed

with a rapidity almost indecent had the work not been so good, until up to the present time Dr. Dods stands sponsor to eleven original books, most of which have run through several editions, has edited no fewer than eight and fifty volumes, and contributed articles, lectures, and reviews in endless numbers, and on every variety of subject, to every variety of magazine. With the possible exception of *Mohammed, Buddha, and Christ*, the limitations of his Glasgow pulpit determined the treatment and theme of these literary achievements; for it was with him the strictest matter of conscience to reserve his whole strength for his people, and devote to the wider public only what after fruits of it remained. Notwithstanding this devotion to literature, Dr. Dods is in no sense a bookworm. He loves books, but he loves men more. He knows books, but he knows men better. A boy with his boys, a young man with young men, interested in everything natural and real; much contact with life has preserved his mind from the perils of the scholar, and safeguarded his ministry from unpracticalness in any form. The world to him is not a place to think in, but a place to live in, a place very much to live in. Hence all his interests are human at bottom, and all his thought and work are dedicated to the service of man.

Those who wish to discover further the causes of Dr. Dods' success, and the type of his ideals, will find them partly disclosed in the only autobiographical fragment he has ever given us, the chapter from his pen in "Books which have Influenced Me." What he owes to Foster and Browning and Faber he there records with ingenuous gratitude. But he does not tell us what of that success is due to mere perseverance, to the ingrained habit of hard, conscientious, and systematic work. How much his influence has been recruited from his own rich humanity, how greatly his strength is derived from sheer good sense and sanity of judgment, his insight from simplicity of

character and singleness of aim, can only be understood by those who know the man. What subtler qualities, also, have gone to the making of his large and child-like nature, it is not for us here to ask. If the impression has been gained that Dr. Dods' is merely a rational mind, or that he is mainly what is known as an "intellectual preacher," we have omitted to state the one thing regarding him that ought to be said. In the profoundest sense Dr. Dods is a spiritual teacher, in the highest degree a moral force. What his people will remember, what his children inherit, his students bless him for, will be the impression he leaves with them of the tremendous reality of the spiritual life, the grandeur and inexhaustible glory of Christianity, the necessity and the urgency of consecrated service, the stimulus to holy living to be found, and to be found alone, in personal contact with Christ, crucified and risen. "He whose memory," to recall words spoken by him to his people which better than any others contain his secret, "He whose memory is haunted by a dying Redeemer, by the thought of One whose love found its most appropriate and practical result in dying for him, is prevented from much sin, and finds in that love the spring of eternal life, that which his soul in deep privacy of his most sacred thoughts can feed upon with joy, that which he builds himself round and broods over as his inalienable possession."

HENRY DRUMMOND.
