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m'ch 16. OPPOSITE STAM'S HLAL.

ONCE IS ENOUGH TO SEE

Gustave Dore's portrait of Dante is worth seeing—once. But once is enough. Some such look you notice on the faces of those who have suffered, and still suffer, much physical pain; people subject to rheumatism, gout, neuralgia, periodic headache, lumbago, or pain from some old lesion. This pain-habit puts its marks on them, as the custom of handling ropes crooks a sailor's fingers; or as too much riding of a bicycle stamps a worried expression on certain faces. No wonder people said of the Italian poet as he passed along, "There goes

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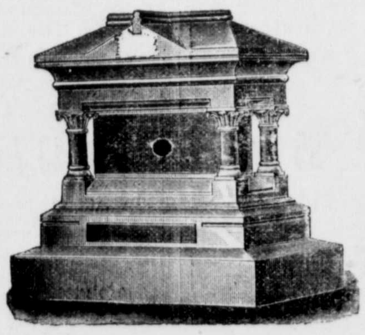

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A VIRGINIA RECTOR.

Interesting Sketch of Rev. Sewell Hepburn, Formerly of Kent.

In one of his congregations Mr. Thomas Nelson Page, who, it is hardly necessary to sav, represents not only literary but aristocratic distinction in Virginia, is a regular attendant. On Sundays, therefore, especially in summer, Mr. Hepburn faces a congregation of which the front row consists of such members of the "F. F. V.'s" and immediately behind them people who can neither read nor write.

"How do you preach to a congregation of that sort?" I inquired.

"Well," he replied, with a laugh, "I preach at the second row."

We came to a turn in the road, and there under the trees stood a little old brick church. Quaint, square, bulging brick pillars supported the little porches, one in front and one at the side. An old brick wall with rounded top inclosed the church yard.

"It is the Old Fork Church," he said.

He tied his horse to a tree, went to the side porch, leaned down and took a big brass key from under the step.

"Everybody knows it is kept here," he remarked.

The church was built in 1735, and has been in constant use ever since. It still stands the venerated sacred place of the vicinity, full of historic associations, not only religious, but civil and military. During both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars it was occupied by the soldiers. It has seen one sect after another rise and spread throughout the region, and yet remains the sanctuary for the people of all creeds and of no creed at all. The interior was strangely unlike an Episcopal church. In the middle of the front wall rose stiffly an old-fashioned wine-glass pulpit. In front of the pulpit stairs on one side was the reading-desk (it could hardly be called a lectern;) in front of the stairs on the other side stood the prayer desk. Between these two, and directly in front of the pulpit, stood what Mr. Hepburn said "no one would call an altar, I reckon—it is a sure-enough table according to the Rubrics." Before the communion rail, which was such as one might see in any country Methodist church, stood on a standard a simple marble font. How old this font is it is not exactly known, but it antidates the Baptist uprising in Virginia. Even at that troublous time the church itself was unharmed; but this font with its standard was carried away by the Baptists in protest against what they thought a false and pernicious doctrine. For years it was lost, but at last it was discovered in a cellar, being used as a receptacle for meat. The standard has apparently irretrievably disappeared; so now the font rests on a wooden standard painted in imitation of marble—the only suspicion of pretense I noticed during my whole days experience. The wooden pews, the warped old communion-table, even the little wooden foot-stools, are the very ones originally placed in the church, and they remained without paint or varnish until this first year of the twentieth century, when the ladies of the church painted the interior with their own hands.

It was with reluctance that I left this little old church. As I got my last glimpse of it at a turn of the road it seemed to be an interpreter of Virginia rural life. In the midst of this country region, apparently so undeveloped as to seem to be new and unsettled, this church stood as a monument to a noble past, a repository of its best traditions, and a symbol of the reverence and hope of the present.

Before Mr. Hepburn left me at the station he took me to one other of his churches. It was a simple, unpretentious wooden structure, apparently containing nothing noteworthy. Mr. Hepburn, however, called my attention to a memorial tablet. The man to whose memory it was erected had regularly visited and addressed the Sunday-school for a long term of years, although he was a Baptist; and so it happens that this memorial to a Baptist stands in an Episcopal church.

If in the course of my trip my observations had led me to fancy that institutional Christianity was only another phase of human selfishness and display, and that religion itself was but a part of sociology, this one day's experience would have been enough to convict me to folly. The Episcopal Church is known to stand among the Protestant bodies distinctively for the claims of institutional religion, and is sometimes charged with selfishness, more often with display. That these qualities are not integral parts of institutional religion, even in its most pronounced form, the life of this Virginian rector is abundant proof. Where reverence needed to be quickened he has brought the dignity of public worship; where consciences needed to be touched he has brought the prod of plain speech; where he has been able neither to preach nor to lead in the worship, he has been ready to serve in the guise of a physician; he has been ready to take any path to the human heart, though it were the heart of a self-ostracised negro, and the path led by the devious way of pulling teeth! So much for selfishness and display. And as to sociology, it would be pretty hard to find it in the religious work of a minister whose people are thinly scattered over a territory of four hundred and eighty square miles.

In the last analysis, every successful religious work that I have seen can be attributed to the same causes that have made Mr. Hepburn's work in a high degree successful—the impact of a dominant personality. Doctrines, organizations, methods, have been the creatures, not the creators, of any religious life I have had the chance to observe. The creator has always been a person. In this case the personality of Mr. Hepburn, though comparatively unaided, was also comparatively untrammeled.

Such a life as Mr. Hepburn's is not unique in Virginia. In fact, with change of personality and location, it is duplicated all through the South. One rector in the city of Richmond told me that early in his ministry he had a similar rural parish. His church was in the centre of population, and there were preaching places, eight, ten, thirteen miles away in different directions. Most of his time he told me, he spent on horseback. And this was his testimony as to the hopefulness of Southern rural life: "There is in the main no sign of moral or religious degeneracy. Nine-tenths of the theological students come from rural parishes. In the parish I had, six men out of fifty communicants have gone into the ministery since I left, eighteen years ago—and it was not a remarkable parish either."

Another rector in Richmond told me that his first experience in the pastorate was in circuit-riding, all in connection with negroes; and that it involved all sorts of work—going into their cabins, giving them orders on stores, providing them with medicines, and praying with them.

I have mentioned these Episcopal ministers because I think it is generally believed that circuit-riding is peculiar to the Methodists. As a matter of fact, I found it common in all denominations in the South. This fact was impressed upon me in conversations I had the privilege of having with several students at Richmond College, one of whom was a minister's son from Georgia, another from Florida, another a resident, I believe, of one of the Carolinas. They all told me the same story of circuit-riding. In the course of one of these conversations I heard of one village of five-hundred inhabitants—and this goes to show that circuit preaching is not confined to the sparsely settled country regions—which had five churches of different denominations, each with a preacher of its own. Not one of these preachers lived in the village. One had his home in the country about ten miles away, the others all had their residence in the city of Richmond. This village was simply a part of their circuits. And yet some Sundays every church was closed. There at least there seemed to be lacking the saving power of the right personality.

The student from Florida was the son of a Baptist minister, in whose circuit was the Baptist church of Tallahassee, the capital of the State. At first he lived outside of Tallahassee and came periodically to preach in the city. Gradually the church grew, until, now that it has a membership of seventy-five, he has moved to Tallahassee, but has retained charge over a church in another place. he was still a circuit preacher, with his headquarters in the capital of the State.

Nothing could better illustrate the fact that in the South rural conditions largely preponderate. And if the country rector whose life I had a glimpse of is typical of rural ministry in the South, as I have good reason to believe, there is justification for the hopefulness which I found to be a southern characteristic.

THE END.

EVERY DAY IS THE BEST DAY.

Some skies may be gloomy,
Some moments be sad,
But everywhere, always,
Some souls must be glad;
For true is the saying
Proclaimed by the seer—
"Each day is the best day
Of somebody's year!"

Each day finds a hero,
Each day helps a saint,
Each day brings to someone
A joy without taint;
Though it may not be my turn
Or yours that is near—
"Each day is the best day
Of somebody's year!"

The calendar sparkles
With days that have brought
Some prize that was longed for,
Some good that was sought;
High deeds happen daily,
Wide truths grow more clear—
"Each day is the best day
Of somebody's year!"

No sun ever rises
But brings joy behind;
No sorrow in fetters
The whole earth can bind;
How selfish our fretting,
How narrow our fear—
"Each day is the best day
Of somebody's year!"

—Priscilla Leonard, in Pittsburg Methodist Recorder.

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