IN THE BROAD ACRES.—Thixendale, an East Riding settlement.

The Week's Book Causerie

Literary Sequences

I WONDER if other book-lovers, in the course of their reading, have had experiences similar to mine in the way of unexpected sequences relating to subjects which have been engaging attention?

I have frequently found, after I have become interested in some particular topic, place, or person, that in the next books I have taken up (with no thought of consecutive study), references to the same things I have been reading about keep cropping up in a most surprising manner. Here is the latest of my "Literary Sequences."

In our public library I found the two volumes of Henry Crabb Robinson's *Diary and Reminiscences*, edited by Dr. Thomas Sadler, and published by Macmillans in 1872. I had never seen this work before; and, although I had often seen references to Crabb Robinson in literary biographies, I knew nothing definite about him. I soon found I was in for "a feast of fat things." The diarist proved to be up to the Baconian standard—a full man, where his reading was concerned; an *exact* man as a writer; and a *ready* man, conversationally. He knew everybody in the literary world of his time—on the Continent, and in England; and carefully documented all his impressions and reflections.

* * * *

HE was born in 1775, and died in 1867. For some years he was a barrister, but becoming independent, was able to cultivate the society of people whose literary powers he admired. He was a special friend of Wordsworth, Southey, De Quincey, Hazlitt, Charles and Mary Lamb; of Madame De Staël, Goëthe, and Schiller; of Julius and Augustus Hare; and of countless others whose companionship he assiduously cultivated. He frequently attended the breakfasts of the banker poet, Samuel Rogers, and from the end of the 18th century far into the 19th he visited, dined, and conversed with the outstanding characters in the world of letters. His diary rivals that of Pepys in fullness and human interest.

I settled down to these volumes with much content, and had delightful glimpses into the inside life of the many famous authors and social celebrities whose sayings and doings it was his delight carefully to record.

One evening, before going on with the diary, I took up a favourite book, *The Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson* of Brighton, and read a few chapters. When I resumed the diary one of the first extracts I came across was an account of Crabb Robinson's first meeting with Robertson, for whom he came to have a specially high regard. Here is the entry:—

"I had an interesting companion at the table d'hôte in a young clergyman, Robertson, who has a curacy at Cheltenham, and who not being in good health has got a few months' holiday. He is now earnestly studying German Literature. We were soon engaged in a discussion on the character of Goëthe. We have since become quite cordial. He is liberal in his opinions, and though he is alarmed at the Puseyites, he seems to dislike the Evangelicals much more. I like him much."

On the following Sunday Crabb Robinson went to the English Chapel, where he heard an admirable sermon from Mr. Robertson, "one much too good to be thrown away on a congregation of forty or fifty persons." After this the diarist met Robertson many times. There are at least eighteen references in the diary to the young clergyman who was considered such a daring thinker in the eighteen-forties. An entry on May 3, 1850, refers to a speech by Robertson to the Brighton Working Class Association, "In which infidelity of a very dangerous kind had sprung up." The clergy of that day looked with great suspicion on the "working class," whose organisations were considered a threat to the discipline and doctrine of the Established Church. Crabb Robinson said: "His speech shows great practical ability. He managed a difficult subject very ably, but it will not be satisfactory, either to the orthodox or the ultra-liberal." Hearing of his death in August, 1853, Crabb Robinson wrote: "Take him for all in all, the best preacher I ever saw in the pulpit, that is uniting the greatest number of excellences, originality, piety, freedom of thought, and warmth of love. His style colloquial and very scriptural. He combined light of the intellect with warmth of the affections in a pre-eminent degree." This verdict was confirmed by Wordsworth, who, after reading Robertson's Sermons, remarked to Crabb Robinson, "The most satisfactory religious teaching which has been offered to this generation."

* * * *

IT so happened that while I was continuing to browse in the diary Malcolm Elwin's *Life of Walter Savage Landor* (Macmillan, 1941) came from the library, and I soon found that Crabb Robinson had much to say about him, and Landor much about the diarist.

Their first meeting was in 1839, at Florence, and Robinson's account of this eccentric genius is very interesting:—

"Met to-day the one man living in Florence whom I was anxious to know. This was Walter Savage Landor, a man of unquestionable genius but very questionable good sense: or rather one of those unmanageable men—

"Blest with huge stores of wit
Who want as much again to manage it."

"I had the good fortune to be introduced to him as the friend of his friends, Southey and Wordsworth. I received an immediate welcome to his villa, situated within a few roods of that most classical spot on the Tuscan Mount, Fiesole, where Boccaccio's hundred tales were told. . . . He (Landor) is a man of florid complexion, with large full eyes, and altogether a leonine man, and with a fierceness of tone well suited to his name: his decisions being confident, and on all subjects whether of taste or life, unqualified: each standing for itself, not caring whether it was in harmony with what had gone before, or would flow from the same oracular lips. But why should I trouble to describe him? He is painted by a master-hand in Dicken's novel *Bleak House*, now in course of publication, where he figures as Mr. Bythorn. The combination of superficial ferocity and inherent tenderness, so admirably portrayed in *Bleak House*, still at first strikes every stranger, no less than his perfect frankness and reckless indifference to what he says."

Turning to the new *Life of Landor*, I found that there were more than twenty references to Crabb Robinson. They met and conversed on all sorts of occasions, and when Robinson moved on from Florence to Rome Landor wrote to a friend in that city, giving his opinion of the diarist: "He was a barrister, and, notwithstanding, both honest and modest—a character I never heard of before: indeed I have never met with one who was either."

* * * *

CRABB ROBINSON not only sought the society of literary men but knew intimately most of the scientists, painters and sculptors of his day. He was also intensely interested in the religious and philosophical speculations and controversies of his time. He came from a Unitarian stock, and was accustomed to deal very frankly with the theorists—orthodox or otherwise—with whom he conversed, and had no use for what he termed "The perverted subtleties of Theologians." He was, however, quick to recognise the value of religion when freed from denominational and doctrinal bigotry and prejudice (as indicated in his enthusiastic approval of F. W. Robertson's enlightened ministry), and his own religious position is summed up in a few memorable words:—

"After as wide a survey of human knowledge as my faculties permit, I find no rest but in the character of Christ, of which I still consider I have but an imperfect conception. He forms the under-current in which float all the hopes of the world for rising out of the present chaos. What we call 'chaos' is, I doubt not, a step in the wisdom of that power which we worship as real though incomprehensible."

Could a thoughtful Methodist say much more? The "chaos" is still present, and the only hope for this distracted world continues to be in the world-wide acknowledgment and practical experience of all that is summed up in the Person and teaching of Christ. Robinson's position is well described in Browning's lines:—

"One steers his bark 'twixt shoal and shelf
And sees each side the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it."

* * * *

AFTER I had gone through the two volumes, and enjoyed not only their contents but also the literary sequences the reading of them had brought me, I thought that now I could give Crabb Robinson a rest. I went away for a motoring week-end, and stayed with a relative in an old-world cottage in a lovely Berkshire village. On going to bed I took up a book or two with me, selected at random. One was *The Joys of London*, a book of charming essays by the Editor of *John O' London's Weekly*, and the first of these that caught my eye was entitled "Henry Crabb Robinson."

The writer tells how he had taken down the two volumes of reminiscences, into which he had not looked for years, and had found it full of absorbing interest. He gave a condensed account of Robertson's life and pursuits, and ended by quoting the diarist's experience of his first railway journey in 1833: "First in order," says Robinson, "describing the 'machine,' is the tall chimney, then the boiler, a barrel-like vessel: then an oblong reservoir of water: then a vessel for coals: and then comes, of a length infinitely extended the train of carriages. What a change this will produce in intercourse! Progress, stoppages included, may certainly be made at the rate of twenty miles an hour!" Such were the mechanical thrills experienced by our forebears in the eighteen-thirties.

It was certainly a strange literary sequence that, although I had taken the wings of the morning, and was at eventide buried in the deepest rusticity, even *there* the presence of my erstwhile mentor and memorialist continued to manifest itself in such a persistent way.

W. GREGORY HARRIS.

Wesley's Sermons

BY REV. FRANK BAKER, B.A., B.D.

MATTHEW PRIOR, that politician-poet whom John Wesley ranked above Pope, and only just below Milton, once said—

"Examples draw when precept fails,
And sermons are less read than tales."

The second line was perhaps of doubtful truth when he wrote it, but it is certainly true now. Sermon-reading is almost a thing of the past. Very few printed sermons, especially old ones, are able to compete with the latest utterance of the latest popular preacher. One has a little sympathy, with George Eliot's phrase, "One may prefer fresh eggs, though laid by a fowl of the meanest understanding, but why fresh sermons?"

Methodists, at any rate, have been trained to appreciate—or at least to tolerate—sermons which have reached a condition which is far from fresh. One is reminded of the society steward who glanced at a preacher's bethumbed and faded manuscript, remarking, "I don't know what your text is, but I know what it ought to be—'Lo, these many years do I serve thee.'!"

Going back far beyond the comparatively short working life of the modern sermon, however, do we really appreciate the great heritage that is ours in the sermons of John Wesley? Of course, we all know—it has prompted many a smile in Local Preachers' Meetings and Synods—that all Methodist preachers are supposed to have read the "Standard Sermons," whether 53 or 44. Perhaps it is this very fact which has caused the neglect of Wesley's Sermons; for Methodists, like any normal human beings, display a healthy dislike for anything which is forced upon them from above, willy-nilly.

Yet, once the initial prejudice has been conquered, it is surprising how much these sermons can offer us, as evangelical theology, as devotional reading, as models of exposition, as literature pure and simple. Those who relish a happy phrase will find "Wayside Pulpits" by the score in Wesley's Sermons. Examples?—

"God's time is always the best time."
"There can be no little sin, till we can find a little God."
"Christianity is essentially a social religion; and to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it."

Of course the reader misses the personal magnetism exercised most unexpectedly by that dapper little clergyman with the sparkling eye. Yet he does not lose as much as in reading the sermons of many great preachers, for with Wesley there was no bludgeoning of the emotions to the point where his hearers were ready to believe and to act; there is under the hypnotic influence of dramatic oratory. John Selden had given a recipe for the popular preacher in the previous century:—

"To preach long, loud, and Damnation, is the way to be cried up. We love a man that Damns us, and we run after him to save us."

Many of Wesley's contemporaries were preachers of this stamp; but not Wesley. Indeed, one of the strangest psychological phenomena of early Methodism was that the calmly reasoned, comparatively unemotional preaching of John Wesley at first occasioned such strange physical manifestations.

* * * *

WESLEY'S first sermon was preached at South Leigh, eight miles from Oxford, on Sunday, September 26, 1725, his text being "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." His last sermon, at Leatherhead, on Wednesday, February 23, 1791, was from a similar text, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found." From the forty or fifty thousand sermons he delivered between these dates the note of appeal was seldom absent. Yet it was always an appeal based on a foundation of careful reasoning. The fourteen neatly written pages of his first sermon reveal the calm orderliness of his mind, which his warmed heart never destroyed.

The first sermon which Wesley published, in 1735, was on Job iii. 17—one of the handful of sermons which he preached before the staff and students of Oxford University assembled at St. Mary's. The next, *Salvation by Faith*, was also preached there, less than three weeks after the momentous experience of May 24, 1738. It was the first manifesto of Methodism, an old sermon preached with a new conviction, to be unhesitatingly accorded the first place in the "Standard Sermons." Other published sermons followed: *Free Grace* (which brought to a head his estrangement from George Whitefield) in 1739; *The Almost Christian* (another University sermon), and *Christian Perfection* in 1741; Charles Wesley's *Awake, thou that sleepest* (which has the top score for frequency of publication among Methodist writings) in 1742; and *Scriptural Christianity*, his last University sermon, which finally barred St Mary's pulpit against him, in 1744.

In an age which swarmed with sermons, this total of seven is very meagre, especially compared with the seventy-seven other publications that Wesley had issued up to the end of 1745. One reason was that he was content to exhort his preachers and people to study the collection of Homilies which King Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth had sponsored two hundred years before. These Wesley had read to his congregation in Georgia, and in 1739 had published extracts from them, entitled *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*. His friends were not satisfied, however; and the first two Methodist Conferences, meeting in 1744 and 1745, urged upon him the duty of publishing a volume of his own sermons.

* * * *

THE renewed prodding in August, 1745, resulted in Wesley's issuing a tiny circular, dated September 9, 1745, entitled: "Proposal for Printing by Subscription, Three Volumes of Sermons, By John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford." Those who were prepared to support him in this literary venture were asked to pay 1s. 6d. down for each unbound volume, and a shilling more on delivery. Booksellers subscribing for six copies were promised a seventh free. The circular stated that "Each Volume will contain at least Ten Sermons, on the same Paper and Letter with these Proposals"—adding optimistically, "The first Volume will be in the Press about Michaelmas, and will be delivered to the Subscriber (if God permit) at or before Christmas." Actually it was not until November of the following year that the *Gentleman's Magazine* could announce the appearance of "A volume of sermons, by J. Wesley, M.A."

The preface is one of Wesley's best efforts; its theme, "I design plain truth for plain people." The sermons are written for "the bulk of mankind"—Wesley's equivalent of our "man in the street." "Nothing here appears in an elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress," he proclaims, and disavows any intention of showing off his learning, though admitting that he may occasionally quote the original Scriptures, or inadvertently slip into unfamiliar phrase. (Actually he quotes a little of Homer's Greek in this very preface, as well as using the famous phrase "*Homo unius libri.*")

Volume I of these *Sermons on Several Occasions* offered two more than the minimum ten promised to the subscribers. Volume II, published in 1748, also contained twelve, as did Volume III, issued in 1750. Ten years later Wesley added a fourth volume, which he mistakenly described as "probably the last which I shall publish." This contained seven sermons, over half of it being taken up with six miscellaneous tracts, partly original, partly extracted from other writers. Nearly thirty years were to pass before Wesley published another volume of sermons, and then, in 1787-8, four new volumes appeared at once, together with reprints of these earlier four. The new ones contained fifty-six sermons, forty-two of which had already been published in monthly instalments in the *Arminian Magazine*. A ninth volume was added after his death.

* * * *

IT was John Wesley himself who by legal action perpetuated his sermons as a doctrinal yardstick for his followers. His Model Deed for Methodist "preaching-houses," first published in 1763, provided that therein should be proclaimed "no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four volumes of Sermons." All succeeding Model Deeds, including the latest in 1932, have contained a similar phrase.

There has been some confusion, however, as to the exact meaning of the later wording about "the first four volumes" of Wesley's Sermons, the editor of the standard edition of his *Works* maintaining that Wesley referred to the first four of the thirty-two volumes of his collected writings issued in 1771, which contained fifty-three sermons. It seems that Wesley himself realised the ambiguity, for when he came to re-issue his sermons separately in 1787-8, the contents of the first four volumes reverted to the original lay-out of the 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760 volumes, with the addition of one sermon on *Wandering Thoughts*, which had been appended to a subsequent edition of Volume III before the 1763 Model Deed was published. These forty-four sermons have, now been legally recognised as the "Standard Sermons" of Methodism.

The new *Model Deed of the Methodist Church* keeps us anchored firmly to these doctrinal standards, stating that "no person or persons whomsoever shall at any time hereafter be permitted to preach or expound God's Holy Word" on Methodist premises "who shall maintain, promulgate, or teach any Doctrine or Practice contrary to what is contained" in these volumes. Let those who are inclined to rebel against this forthright declaration read also the explanatory clause in the *Deed of Union*—

"The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist Preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation."

We believe Wesley himself would have rejoiced in these comforting yet challenging words. Wesley's Sermons, like the Scriptures on which they are based, get to grips with the spiritual needs and opportunities of the ordinary man; and Methodism to-day would certainly not suffer from a renewed emphasis on such practical—even if not always popular—preaching.

"Wesley's Sermons." *Methodist Recorder* (September 20, 1945): 9.

Matthew Prior, that politician-poet whom John Wesley ranked above Pope, and only just below Milton, once said—

> "Examples draw when precept fails,
> And sermons are less read than tales."

The second line was perhaps of doubtful truth when he wrote it, but it is certainly true now. Sermon-reading is almost a thing of the past. Very few printed sermons, especially old ones, are able to compete with the latest utterance of the latest popular preacher. One has a little sympathy with George Eliot's phrase, "One may prefer fresh eggs, though laid by a fowl of the meanest understanding, but why fresh sermons?"

Methodists, at any rate, have been trained to appreciate—or at least to tolerate—sermons which have reached a condition which is far from fresh. One is reminded of the society steward who glanced at a preacher's bethumbed and faded manuscript, remarking, "I don't know what your text is, but I know what it ought to be—'Lo, these many years do I serve thee'!"

Going back far beyond the comparatively short working life of the modern sermon, however, do we really appreciate the great heritage that is ours in the sermons of John Wesley? Of course, we all know—it has prompted many a smile in Local Preachers' Meetings and Synods—that all Methodist preachers are supposed to have read the "Standard Sermons," whether 53 or 44. Perhaps it is this very fact which has caused the neglect of Wesley's Sermons; for Methodists, like any normal human beings, display a healthy dislike for anything which is forced upon them from above, willy-nilly.

Yet, once the initial prejudice has been conquered, it is surprising how much these sermons can offer us, as evangelical theology, as devotional reading, as models of exposition, as literature pure and simple. Those who relish a happy phrase will find "Wayside Pulpits" by the score in Wesley's Sermons. Examples?—

> "God's time is always the best time."
> "There can be no little sin, till we can find a little God."
> "Christianity is essentially a social religion; and to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it."

Of course the reader misses the personal magnetism exercised most unexpectedly by that dapper little clergyman with the sparkling eye. Yet he does not lose as much as in reading the sermons of many great preachers, for with Wesley there was no bludgeoning of the emotions to the point where his hearers were ready to believe and to do anything under the hypnotic influence of dramatic oratory. John Selden had given a recipe for the popular preacher in the previous century:—

> "To preach long, loud, and Damnation, is the way to be cried up. We love a man that Damns us, and we run after him to save us."

Many of Wesley's contemporaries were preachers of this stamp; but not Wesley. Indeed, one of the strangest psychological phenomena of early Methodism was that the calmly reasoned,

comparatively unemotional preaching of John Wesley at first occasioned such strange physical manifestations.

Wesley's first sermon was preached at South Leigh, eight miles from Oxford, on Sunday, September 26, 1725, his text being "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." His last sermon, at Leatherhead, on Wednesday, February 23, 1791, was from a similar text, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." From the forty or fifty thousand sermons he delivered between these dates the note of appeal was seldom absent. Yet it was always an appeal based on a foundation of careful reasoning. The fourteen neatly written pages of his first sermon reveal the calm orderliness of his mind, which his warmed heart never destroyed.

The first sermon which Wesley published, in 1735, was on Job iii. 17—one of the handful of sermons which he preached before the staff and students of Oxford University assembled at St. Mary's. The next, *Salvation by Faith*, was also preached there, less than three weeks after the momentous experience of May 24, 1738. It was the first manifesto of Methodism, an old sermon preached with a new conviction, to be unhesitatingly accorded the first place in the "Standard Sermons." Other published sermons followed: *Free Grace* (which brought to a head his estrangement from George Whitefield) in 1739; *The Almost Christian* (another University sermon), and *Christian Perfection* in 1741; Charles Wesley's *Awake, thou that sleepest* (which has the top score for frequency of publication among Methodist writings) in 1742; and *Scriptural Christianity*, his last University sermon, which finally barred St. Mary's pulpit against him, in 1744.

In an age which swarmed with sermons, this total of seven is very meagre, especially compared with the seventy-seven other publications that Wesley had issued up to the end of 1745. One reason was that he was content to exhort his preachers and people to study the collection of *Homilies* which King Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth had sponsored two hundred years before. These Wesley had read to his congregation in Georgia, and in 1739 had published extracts from them, entitled *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*. His friends were not satisfied, however; and the first two Methodist Conferences, meeting in 1744 and 1745, urged upon him the duty of publishing a volume of his own sermons.

The renewed prodding in August, 1745, resulted in Wesley's issuing a tiny circular, dated September 9, 1745, entitled: "Proposal for Printing by Subscription, Three Volumes of Sermons, By John Wesley, M.A., Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford." Those who were prepared to support him in this literary venture were asked to pay 1s. 6d. down for each unbound volume, and a shilling more on delivery. Booksellers subscribing for six copies were promised a seventh free. The circular stated that "Each Volume will contain at least Ten Sermons, on the same Paper and Letter with these Proposals"—adding optimistically, "The first Volume will be in the Press about Michaelmas, and will be delivered to the Subscriber (if God permit) at or before Christmas." Actually it was not until November of the following year that the *Gentleman's Magazine* could announce the appearance of "A volume of sermons, by J. Wesley, M.A."

The preface is one of Wesley's best efforts; its theme, "I design plain truth for plain people." The sermons are written for "the bulk of mankind"—Wesley's equivalent of our "man in the street." "Nothing here appears in an elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress," he proclaims, and disavows any intention of showing off his learning, though admitting that he may occasionally quote the original Scriptures, or inadvertently slip into unfamiliar phrase. (Actually he quotes a little of Homer's Greek in this very preface, as well as using the famous phrase "*Homo unius libri*.")

Volume I of these *Sermons on Several Occasions* offered two more than the minimum

ten promised to the subscribers. Volume II, published in 1748, also contained twelve, as did Volume III, issued in 1750. Ten years later Wesley added a fourth volume, which he mistakenly described as "probably the last which I shall publish." This contained seven sermons, over half of it being taken up with six miscellaneous tracts, partly original, partly extracted from other writers. Nearly thirty years were to pass before Wesley published another volume of sermons, and then, in 1787–8, four new volumes appeared at once, together with reprints of these earlier four. The new ones contained fifty-six sermons, forty-two of which had already been published in monthly instalments in the *Arminian Magazine*. A ninth volume was added after his death.

It was John Wesley himself who by legal action perpetuated his sermons as a doctrinal yardstick for his followers. His Model Deed for Methodist "preaching-houses," first published in 1763, provided that therein should be proclaimed "no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four volumes of Sermons." All succeeding Model Deeds, including the latest in 1932, have contained a similar phrase.

There has been some confusion, however, as to the exact meaning of the later wording about "the first four volumes" of Wesley's Sermons, the editor of the standard edition of his *Works* maintaining that Wesley referred to the first four of the thirty-two volumes of his collected writings issued in 1771, which contained fifty-three sermons. It seems that Wesley himself realised the ambiguity, for when he came to re-issue his sermons separately in 1787–8, the contents of the first four volumes reverted to the original lay-out of the 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760 volumes, with the addition of one sermon on *Wandering Thoughts*, which had been appended to a subsequent edition of Volume III before the 1763 Model Deed was published. These forty-four sermons have now been legally recognised as the "Standard Sermons" of Methodism.

The new *Model Deed of the Methodist Church* keeps us anchored firmly to these doctrinal standards, stating that "no person or persons whomsoever shall at any time hereafter be permitted to preach or expound God's Holy Word" on Methodist premises "who shall maintain, promulgate, or teach any Doctrine or Practice contrary to what is contained" in these volumes. Let those who are inclined to rebel against this forthright declaration read also the explanatory clause in the *Deed of Union*—

> "The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist Preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation."

We believe Wesley himself would have rejoiced in these comforting yet challenging words. Wesley's Sermons, like the Scriptures on which they are based, get to grips with the spiritual needs and opportunities of the ordinary man; and Methodism to-day would certainly not suffer from a renewed emphasis on such practical—even if not always popular—preaching.

By Rev. Frank Baker, B.A., B.D.