

17 FEBRUARY 1912

THE DICKENS' CENTENARY

TOPICAL SERMON AT TENTERDEN.

At the Old Meeting House, Tenterden, on Sunday evening, Mr. Harold Rylett delivered an address on "Charles Dickens." He said he was unwilling that the Dickens' centenary should pass unremarked in Tenterden, and he would offer his humble contribution to the subject. Dickens had two original talents, he had a talent for seeing things and a talent for telling what he saw, and so used them that he added both to their quality and to their number, and became not only a great story-teller, but a great preacher, and gave the world sermons full of the most beautiful and inspiring teachings of the Master Preacher—Jesus Christ. Hence he ranked with the Immortals, with those whose writings would be powerfully helpful as long as human life should last. It might be thought that it was simple enough to see things, but there was a world of difference between looking at things and seeing them. Dickens did not merely look at things—he saw them. He saw the misery of the poor, and if he did not tell us how to cure it, he did make us ashamed that so much wretchedness should exist side by side with so much luxury, and he moved others to think about the social problem and labour for its solution. And he touched the springs of charity so that people of wealth were impelled to give gladly of their abundance to alleviate the lot of those less fortunate than themselves. He saw how callously we dealt with the poor in the Workhouses of the time, and we had only to read what he told us about it and compare it with what prevailed to-day to realise how he used his talent of telling what he saw. No change that had come into the public mind in our time was greater than that which had come over it in regard to our way of dealing with the poor. The public mind was hit in the direction of getting rid of the blight of poverty. We were proceeding step by step, slowly, perhaps, but surely, and might hope that ere long poverty as our fathers knew it, and even as we knew it, would be practically unknown. And this healthier and more Christian mood of the public mind was very largely due to Charles Dickens. Again Dickens saw sin, and so told of it that men and women loathed it, shrank from it, resisted it. Here especially was Dickens' greatness seen. He used not his talent of telling to make vice so attractive as to be almost preferable to virtue. He did not excuse, nor did he condemn the sinner, but emulating the Master's Divine Companion, said "Go and sin no more." Dickens saw human life in all its varied moods. He saw its drolleries and so told us what he saw that he made us laugh till our sides ached, he saw its sorrows and made us sympathise till the tears ran down our cheeks. He saw its rascality—and made us rejoice when he smote it. He saw its weaknesses, and so told us of them that we no longer derided them but pitied them. Poor Micawber, who was always waiting for something to turn up! He was only weak. There was a strain of goodness in him after all, and we all rejoiced to find his weakness overcome and his strength developed when he found himself face to face with the golden opportunity under the Southern Cross! And Dickens saw hypocrisy and showed it to us in the person of the gross, canting parson, Chadband, and the loathsome Pecksniff. But he saw love, too, and how wonderfully he told us of it. What a Divine passion it was—holy, undefiled! No modern writer had equalled Dickens here. How beautifully pure and ennobling were the loves of Dickens' lovers. How sublimely sweet the loves of his fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters! He saw integrity and uprightness and so told of them that we honoured and revered the characters that revealed them. He saw friendship and told of it so that we saw it a glorious thing that made life worth living. We loved Mr. Pickwick for his geniality and benevolence, and Sam Weller for his liveliness and wit, but we loved them both the more for their devoted friendship for each other, a friendship which was none the less that the one was master and the other servant. And so Dickens exalted and glorified all that was noblest and best in human life and threw all that was meanest and worst into darker shade so that all who read were drawn to choose the better part. That was the great sermon he preached, and it had for its text: "Turn

from your wickedness and live." The talents that were added in Dickens were Faith, and Hope and Love. As he saw human life and told what he saw, Faith and Hope and Love grew grandly in him. With the eye of Faith he saw a nobler life than that with which he was surrounded, and he inspired his readers to hope for it and to work for it. It was a thing worth hoping and working for, for it was compounded of love. There was one of Dickens' stories in which this sermon was preached in particular. It told how a stony heart was softened. It was "A Christmas Carol." Mr. Rylett concluded by summarising the story and reading selections from it.

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| Baptisms | 23 August 1912 | Louise Avery (Adult Baptism) |
| | 4 September 1912 | Annie Avery (Adult Baptism) |
| | | Edith Avery (Adult Baptism) |
| Marriage | 5 November 1912 | George Sidney Bunn and Louie Avery |
| Baptism | 5 December 1912 | Robert John Gillett |