

The "Marrow Men."

A SERMON BY DR. ALEXANDER WHYTE.

Preached before the Baptist Union on Wednesday, October 9th, at St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh.

Psalm lxxiii, 5.—"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness."

When Thomas Boston, our Scottish Father-in-God, was still in a half-converted state, and when he was still on the scent for salvation—to employ his own graphic expression about himself—in the course of his pastoral visitation, he made a call one day at the house of an old soldier, who had served in the great Civil War in England. The old Covenanter-soldier had brought home, with him a little book that was an immense favorite with the Puritan people of England at that period; and the little book lay on the old soldier's window-sill when Boston made his visit that day. Boston was a great lover of books—he had very few of them—and he instinctively took up the little volume to see what it was. "The Marrow of Modern Divinity, by Edward Fisher M. A., of Oxford." Boston had never seen the little book before, nor so much as heard the name of its author, but the striking title-page, and the glance that Boston took at the contents of the book, led him to ask for a loan of the little volume, and for weeks and months to come the Marrow was never out of Boston's hands till he had the great evangelical classic by heart, and till, by the grace of God to Boston, Edward Fisher had finished what Henry Erskine had long ago begun. Boston's best people soon began to see that some great change had come over their minister. Boston had always been a powerful and a pungent preacher. Like John Bunyan, in his early minister also, Boston had always preached sin with great "sense." Boston's early preaching, he tells us in his "Autobiography," had "terrified the godly," but that had been nearly all it had hitherto done. But, after the Marrow had done its work in Boston, his preaching began to take an entirely new character. He did not preach sin with any less "sense"—with any less passion, that is—but

HE NOW PREACHED SIN, AND EVERYTHING ELSE, WITH FAR MORE SOLEMNITY, AND TENDERNESS, AND LOVE.

His whole pulpit and pastoral work took on from that time an entirely new earnestness, an entirely new scripturalness, richness, inwardness, and depth, all of which was as new and as sweet to Boston himself as it was to his spiritually-minded people. Wherever Boston went to preach, and he was now more than ever sought after for communion seasons all over the South of Scotland, a special blessing went everywhere with him. And when any of his brethren ventured to remark on the new power of his preaching, Boston immediately attributed it all to the Marrow.

Having prevailed on its owner to part with the little book for its price, Boston lent the volume to friend after friend, till, at last, it fell into the hands of James Hog, of Carnock. James Hog, of Carnock, was one of the ablest divines, and one of the best preachers of his day, in Scotland, and, on reading the Marrow, the saintly scholar thought he saw his opportunity. Hog sat down and wrote a strongly-worded introduction to the hitherto unknown little book, and an enterprising and sympathizing Edinburgh publisher put a Scottish edition of the Marrow upon the northern market; and the venture at once repaid both its editor and its publisher, for the Marrow was soon as well-known in Scotland as the "Pilgrim's Progress," and the "Saint's Rest" and "Rutherford's Letters"—and what more can be said about the best success of any book?

THEN AROSE THE GREAT "MARROW CONTROVERSY," as it was called, a controversy in which the leaders of the General Assembly played such a deplorable part, and a controversy in which Thomas Boston and James Hog and Gabriel Wilson and Ralf and Ebenezer Erskine bore such a noble and ever-honourable part. That was a great day for the Gospel of the Grace of God in Scotland, when the "Twelve Marrow Men," as they were called, stood at the bar of the General Assembly, and when Boston, as their spokesman, addressed the Moderator of the hostile house and said: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." And from that notable day the doctrines of Grace took root again in the pulpits of Scotland, as those doctrines had first taken root two centuries before in the pulpits of Knox and Brown, and Balloch, and Welsh, and as those same doctrines again took root during the "ten years' conflict" of our fathers' day, and during the memorable years that followed that conflict, and which are still following it down to this day. That great conflict is already arising in its deepest springs when we read in Thomas Chalmers's diary such entries as these: "I am reading the Marrow, and I am deriving from it great light and satisfaction. It is a masterly performance." "August the 24th. Finished the Marrow. I feel a glowing delight in the fullness and all-sufficiency of Christ. O, my God! Bring me nearer to thy Son!" And Chalmers's reading of the Marrow was blessed to him, and his prayer was answered in the creation of the Free Church of Scotland, and in many other things that we see around us and before us

in Scotland today. Read Dr. Chalmers's Life by Dr. Hanna, and get your children to read it. The book is a masterpiece in literature, and its noble evangelical lessons cannot fail to impress, and quicken, and strengthen both the mind, and the heart, and the character of everyone who reads it. All ministers especially should have Chalmers's Life by heart.

It was

THE FASHION OF THE DAY

to cast the teaching of the day into the form of a dialogue. William Law, among others, has made splendid use of that literary device. Law has immortalized that literary device in more than one of his immortal works. And Edward Fisher, being a man of letters as well as of religion, determined to cast his apostolic doctrine into the same dialogue device. And he accordingly makes his dialogue to be carried on between Evangelista, a minister in the gospel; Nomista, a legalist; Antinomista, an anti-nomian, and Neopitista, a young, and, as yet, an un-instructed Christian. If you can lay your hands on a copy of Edward Fisher's Marrow, edited by Thomas Boston and enriched with his notes, you will have in your possession a very complete and a very ably-reasoned-out statement of apostolical, evangelical, and experimental truth. And if you add to Boston's edition of the Marrow John Brown of Whitburn's most valuable book, entitled, "Gospel Truth Accurately Stated and Illustrated," you will possess in those two treatises, taken together, a very masterly and a conclusive discussion of the whole "Marrow Controversy." The exact scholarship, the wide reading, the intellectual power, and the spiritual fervor of both these books will be a great surprise and a great delight to everyone who has the mind and the heart to master them. I open the Marrow anywhere, and I immediately come upon something like this: "But, sir," says the neophyte to his minister, "Has such an one as I am any title, or invitation, or warrant to come to Christ, and to claim him as my Redeemer?" "Your warrant to claim Christ as your Redeemer," says Evangelista, "is just God's call on you to do so. For this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, as He gave us commandment. And, furthermore, we have God's sure and infallible promise that whosoever believeth on His Son shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life." "Listen to Luther," says the minister: "'He saw in me,' says Luther, 'nothing but wickedness, nothing but a lost sheep going astray. Yet the good Shepherd had mercy on me; and of His pure and undeserved grace He loved me, and gave Himself for me. But who is this me?' exclaims Luther. 'Even Martin Luther, a wretched and already condemned sinner, was so dearly loved by the Son of God, that He gave Himself for me! O!' cries Luther in every Reformation sermon of his, 'O, print this word me in your heart, and apply it to yourself, not doubting but that you are one of those to whom this me belongs.'" "Indeed, sir," replies the neophyte, "if I were as good as some men are, then I could easily believe what you say. But, alas, sir, I am such a sinful wretch, that I can not believe that Christ will accept of me till I am much better than I am." "Alas, man!" the minister replies, "in thus speaking, you take it upon you to correct and contradict, not Paul and Luther only, but Christ Himself. For, whereas Paul says that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the chief of sinners.

YOU SEEM TO HOLD THAT HE CAME TO SAVE SUCH AS WERE NOT REALLY LOST.

And whereas Christ Himself says that the whole need not a physician, you hold that a sinner must be well on the way to recovery before he need call for Christ to come and heal him. You seem to think that the spouse of Christ must be adorned and perfumed with robes and ointments of her own providing before her husband will receive her. Whereas He Himself says to her, 'No eye pitied thee to do any of those things unto thee. But when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold! thy name was a time of love. And I spread my spirit over thee: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a sure covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine. And I will marry thee to me in righteousness and in mercy and in everlasting faithfulness and thou shalt be mine.'" "Why sir, then, it seems, that the vilest sinner in this whole world ought not to be discouraged in coming to Christ." "Surely not!" replies the minister. "Nay, let me say one word more: the greater, the more awful any man's sins have been and still are, either in their nature or their number, the more haste that man should make to say with David, 'for Thy Name's sake, O, Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.'"

There was nothing that the Reformers in Germany and in Switzerland and the Marrow men in Scotland preached with more ability and eloquence and success than just the particular and personal offer of Christ to every individual sinner. The Marrow men were very bold in this matter. They possessed a free and a full salvation in their own souls, and, in the name of God, they held out the offer of that same salvation to every man. Who are you? and what is your name? they demanded as they preached. Because we have a message from God immediately and personally to you. Is your name David in the matter of Uriah? Or Peter after his fall? Or

Mary Magdalene, and she still possessed with seven devils? Or Saul still breathing out threatenings and slaughter? Is your name Luther the monk? or Bunyan the tinker? or Boston still in a half-converted state? You! they cried, singling out each individual hearer. You! and you! and you!

TO YOU IS THE WORD OF THIS SALVATION SENT.

Here is a sample of their fine pulpit work taken out of Walter Marshall, that great master in Israel, that perfect Euclid of evangelical sanctification, as I am wont to call him to myself. Oh! where are such masterly books as the Marrow? Is the Gospel mystery to be found again on every window-sill in Scotland and England, as was once the case? "You are to be fully persuaded," says Marshall, "and in your own particular case, that if you trust in Christ sincerely and perseveringly you shall have eternal life in Him, as well as the greatest saint in all the world. For the promise is universal, that whosoever believeth on him shall not be put to shame. Conclude within yourself, then, that, howsoever vile and wicked and unworthy you may be, yet, if you come, you also shall be accepted. It is this that hinders so many wounded consciences and broken hearts from coming to the Great Physician. They are so dead in sin, they are so corrupt in heart, they are so without the least spark of any grace or goodness in themselves, that they think it to be nothing short of sheer presumption in them to expect to be saved. But why so? They can be but the chief of sinners; and is this not a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the chief of sinners? If they that are dead in sin cannot be saved, then all men must despair and perish; for no man has one spark of spiritual life in him till he comes for it, and receives it from Christ. Others think that they have outstayed their time, till there is no place of repentance left for them. But, behold, to every sinner still out of hell, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." And as Marshall and Fisher, following Luther and Knox, preached that personal, and individualising, and immediate Gospel of free grace, a great multitude of our own fore-fathers believed unto everlasting life.

But to my mind,

THE MARROW MEN EXCELLED THEMSELVES IN THE WAY THEY PREACHED THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

Both in Germany, and in Switzerland, and in France, the full assurance of faith was splendidly preached in those first days of a recovered Gospel. And to acknowledge his sources, and to confess his indebtedness, and to assure his readers concerning his doctrine of the assurance of faith, the author of the Marrow actually gives his readers the names of some sixty-four theologians and preachers in all the Reformed Churches of Christendom, out of whose writings he had drawn this substance of his great evangelical dialogue. Now, what exactly is the assurance of faith? Well, it is, in short, just this—that all true faith has its witness in itself. All true faith is its own best evidence and surest proof. As thus—a minister preaches Jesus Christ and Him crucified to his people. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to his people. And he pleads with them as an ambassador to be reconciled to God. The people listen; they attend; they begin to think; they begin to believe. One thing, another thing, many things, all work together to lead them to believe. A bad conscience, a bad heart, trials in life and losses, approaching old age, fear of death and judgment—all these things, under the hand of the Holy Ghost, work together till the people are led to rest all their trust and hope on the Lord Jesus Christ. And, already as they begin to believe and trust and hope, the peace of God begins to be shed abroad in their hearts, and their minister's Gospel preaching leads the people on from faith to faith, and from strength to strength, till they are able to certify and assure their own hearts, till the Holy Ghost is able to assure and seal their hearts, as He sealed and assured Paul's heart, into this full assurance of faith, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." And as faith grows, its full assurance will grow till the true believer is able to say with the apostle, "He loved me and gave himself for me." It is something not unlike this. A man loves a woman. He has long loved her unknown to her, till one day he takes her and opens his heart to her. She listens to him. She believes him, till her heart is carried captive to him. And from that great espousal day she has his promise, and he has hers. And from that day she has an assurance of his truth and his love that nothing will shake. Absence, distance, land and sea between her and him—her assurance only the firmer holds her heart. No news, bad news even; other lovers approaching her lonely heart—No! In all these things her faith, her full assurance of faith in her espoused husband, conquers all. Now, the believing heart is just like that. Nothing can ever pluck the true believer out of Christ's hands, nor Christ out of the true believer's heart. He may not be always sensibly near you. He may be away in a far country. He is away; but, then, he is away preparing a place for you. Then he will come again, and receive you to himself. Therefore make yourself ready. Keep yourself ready. Have