

REV. JOHN McNEILL.

THE SCOTTISH SPURGEON.

A man has arisen in Scotland who as a preacher has attracted great attention in his native land, and who not long since was settled in Regent Square Church, London, which may be said to be the leading Presbyterian Church in Britain. He has been called "The Scottish Spurgeon" and some have prophesied that if spared he will in the next quarter to half century fill the place in the pulpit world that Spurgeon has occupied in the past.

He is a young man, thirty five years of age, and began life as a railway man. As he is likely to occupy a prominent place in the years that are to come, we will give a brief account of his life which was published in the *London Christian*.

It is the summer of the year 1872, and we are speeding by rail along the eastern shore of the Firth of Clyde. We have just left behind us the busy port of Greenock, and our eyes are feasting on a magnificent panorama of mountain and sea, wood and glen, when the train draws up at a little station and a strong and cheery voice cries, "Inverkip! Tickets ready." Presently the carriage door is opened and a burly youth of eighteen, in official corduroy and buttons, and with a frank and smiling countenance relieves us of our passport to Wemyss Bay. As the wheels move again we get another glance at that happy boy; then we look down the hillside at a few cottages embosomed among trees, and there is mirrored in our mind the humble and uneventful career of a village railway porter.

Fifteen years pass away. It is a Sabbath evening in the city of Edinburgh, in the tropical summer of 1887. We are in the midst of an immense throng in a circus, one of the city's largest public buildings. The crowded passages and expectant looks plainly tell that the gathering is unusual. Very quietly there steps on the platform a powerfully built man in the prime of life, with a face speaking of health and good nature. The clerical collar that surmounts the tightly buttoned surcoat proclaims his calling, and the open Bible his purpose. As he surveys the vast audience he strokes his beard, his brow furrows, and overspreading his countenance is a look not free from pain. Does he hear the hum of bees and see the blue smoke curl among village woods. Does his heart

tremble as he thinks of the plough to which he has put his hand? For the railway porter of Inverkip and the Edinburgh preacher are one and the same.

It was at Houston, a village of Renfrewshire, on July 7th, 1854, that John McNeill first saw the light. His father, who is now spending the evening of his life in Glasgow, is a native of the country of Antrim, but comes of a Scottish stock. Crossing the Channel forty years ago, he settled in Houston, where he married, and in whose quarries he gained his livelihood. A hearty and manly man this father uniting in him the strong religious conviction of the Covenanter with a humor that smacks of both Scotia and Erin. It is not difficult to discover where the preacher got his faculty of uttering "snell" sayings. The mother, whose maiden name was McTaggart, died a few years ago, leaving to her large family the precious memory of a noble Christian life. The home was teetotal; hence the "Scottish Spurgeon's" war with the bottle. There appears to be a poetic strain in the blood, as evinced by the touching verses occasionally published, by Miss Kate McNeill, who, if lacking her brother's humour, has all his pathos. Another member of the family is about to study for the ministry.

When Mr. McNeill was twelve years old the family removed to Inverkip, the father becoming foreman in a quarry there. At the village schools the boy received an education consisting of the ordinary English branches, together with the rudiments of Latin and French. The Free Church minister at Houston remembers being struck by John's habit of sitting alone on the doorstep for long spells of meditation—so unusual in a boy. On leaving school the lad entered the employment of the Caledonian Railway Company as gate-boy at Inverkip Station. By-and-by he became porter and he had a narrow escape one day when engaged in coupling waggons. He can never forget having been a "railway man"; the finger the buffers nipped is ever before him. After three years in this humble occupation he was promoted to the booking-office at Greenock. Spending every Sabbath under the parental roof he worshipped with the family in the Free church of Inverkip; and, under the ministry of Rev. Peter Douglas, he became conscious of a great change in his attitude towards God. His conversion, however, had not been preceded by a course of open