

Pastor and People.

II. HUGH BINNING THE YOUTHEL DIVINE.

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There is a great charm about the life and work of Hugh Binning to all who become thoroughly acquainted with him. He was so devoutly pious from his childhood, so consecrated to God in his work, and so diligent in the acquisition of sacred learning, that for his years he was one of the best furnished and most cultivated of the old Scotch worthies. His life was very short, yet in it he did good work and left in his sermons a monument every way worthy of him. Indeed, when we remember that his ministry extended only over four years, and that he died in his twenty-fifth year, we are astonished at the bulky volume of sermons he has left behind him; and when we read them we are even more astonished at their quality, so solid, so judicious, so ripe; and at their style, so free from Scottishisms, so easy, exhibiting a perfect command of the English tongue, and at their range of subjects, showing a large and living Christian experience, as well as a richly furnished mind; and at their treatment, so wise, so winning, so complete, revealing a mind of rare culture. His spirit as well as his life remind one very strongly of Robert Murray McCheyne.

Hugh Binning was the son of John Binning, of Dalvernan, and was born about 1627. We are not informed in any biography of him, we have seen, where, nor have we any hint of how he passed his early days, save this, which is sufficiently explicit: "He began to have sweet familiarity with God, and to live in near communion with Him. Before others of his years began seriously to lay to heart their lost and undone state and condition by nature; so that before he arrived at the thirteenth or fourteenth year of his age, he had even attained to such experience in the ways of God, that the most judicious and exalted Christians in the place confessed that they were much edified, strengthened and comforted by him; nay, he provoked them to diligence in the duties of religion, being abundantly sensible that they were much outrun by such a youth." While at the grammar school, when his fellows were at play, he was either in secret duty with God or in conference with religious people. At fourteen he went to the University of Glasgow and there made rapid advances in philosophy, he being of so ready apprehension that he did more in an hour than others did in many days by hard study and close application. At length he took his Master's degree with great applause, and immediately began the study of divinity with a view to the ministry. A vacancy occurring in the Chair of Philosophy at Glasgow, and applicants being invited to compete for it, Mr. Binning presented himself along with many more, and so conducted the discussion of the thesis committed to him, that he was adjudged superior to all other applicants. So he became at nineteen years of age Regent and Professor of Philosophy in the university. He had no time to prepare a system of philosophy before he entered upon the duties of his Chair, but so fertile was his mind that he fulfilled the highest conceptions entertained of him, with great learning and marked ability. "He was the first in Scotland to reform philosophy from the barbarous terms and unintelligible jargon of the schoolmen." He filled the Chair of Philosophy three years with acceptance and honour, and carried on his studies in theology at the same time. The parish of Govan being vacant, he was called to it, having preached there to the great satisfaction of the people. The Presbytery approved of the call and he was ordained to the work of the ministry, being only twenty-two years of age.

He was weak in body, and not able to read much at a time, nor undergo the fatigue of continual study, yet he was a prodigy of learning, having such a large stock of useful knowledge, that he was "*philologus, philosophus, et theologus, eximius*"—philologist, philosopher, and excellent theologian. A story is told of how he did his work as a preacher. He had gone to fetch home a wife to himself—he married a Barbara Simpson, daughter of Mr. James Simpson, a minister in Ireland—and the day of the weekly sermon being come in a neighbouring parish, he went with several other ministers to hear it. But the minister of that parish expecting them delayed the sermon till they would come; hoping to have help of them. Trying each one he failed, till he came to the bridegroom, who yielded and consented to preach. Stepping aside a little to premeditate, and implore his Master's presence and assistance (*for he was ever afraid to be alone in his work*) he entered the pulpit immediately and preached upon 1 Peter i. 15, "But as He that calleth you is holy, etc.," at which time he was so remarkably helped that all acknowledged that God was with him of a truth. Through his life he was a man of a catholic and healing spirit, he sought to quiet the strong passions of the times, and bring all into the sweet harmony of Christian love.

Cromwell and his Ironsides, while doing much good politically, did, to the minds of many who lived at this time, no good ecclesiastically. He broke down all church order with his loose and lawless liberality.

Here is a word of Binning's on the times, which reveals the breadth of his mind and the healing disposition of his heart: "What if the Lord hath defaced all that this kingdom was instrumental in building up in England, that He alone may have the glory of a Second Temple more glorious? Many things there may be in His mind, and *He is in one mind and who can turn Him?* and what His soul desireth even that He doeth; and this may be enough to satisfy us. *He sees and knows all His works from the beginning.*" (Sermon on Deut. xxxii. 4, 5.) After he had laboured four years in the ministry, he died in 1653, in the twenty-sixth year of his age, leaving behind him a sweet saviour in the hearts of all who knew him. He was considered an orator inferior to none in Scotland or England. James Durham, of Glasgow, a famous man in his day, and renowned still, said: "There is no speaking after Mr. Binning." His works show this to be simple truth. The good sized volume of his works comprise, 1. *The Common Principles of the Christian Religion*, in twenty-seven sermons on the Catechisms, 11. *The Sinner's Sanctuary*, being forty sermons on Rom. viii. 3, 111. *Fellowship with God*, twenty-eight sermons on the First Epistle of John, 12. *Heart Humiliation*, being eighteen sermons on several choice texts. It is a rich and rare volume. I borrowed it from my old, dear friend and fellow-soldier, now gone to his reward, the Rev. Walter Inglis, of Ayr, who was one man in a thousand, and it came to him from his mother, a precious gift. It is a veritable casket of diamonds. Talk of the English Puritan theology! the Scottish theology of the same period is not a whit behind it, in clear ideas in massive grasp, in forceful presentation, in profound spiritual experience and sympathy. It is a mine to be wrought diligently. The best theologian is not dishonoured in being indebted to it. I would like to give a specimen of the precious things in this book, but so much might be given, and space is so limited that I am almost forbidden, yet I will venture a few brief selections.

See how his sanctified wisdom shines here! "Doctrines as things have their seasons and times, everything is beautiful in its season; so there is no word of truth but it hath a season and time in which it is beautiful. And indeed, this is a great part of wisdom, to bring forth everything in its season, to discover when and where and to whom it is pertinent and edifying to speak such and such truths. But there is one doctrine that is never out of season. . . The news of a Redeemer to captive sinners." Again, Dr. A. A. Bonar quotes from a sermon on Matt. xii. 28, this pregnant sentence, "The order of the Gospel is a great part of the Gospel." Behold his spiritual knowledge! His word! "Communion and fellowship with God is the great end and design of the Gospel, and it is the great result of all a Christian's pains and progress; it is not only the greatest part of religion, but the greatest reward of religion too; for piety hath its reward and happiness in the bosom of it, without borrowing from external things. Now that which this sweet and fragrant fruit, which perfumes all the soul with delight and fills it with joy, springs out of a conformity to God, assimilation of nature and disposition," etc. Again, "There is no settlement to the spirit of a sinner that is once touched with the sense of his sins, and apprehensive of the justice and wrath of God, but in some clear and distinct understanding of the grounds of consolation in the Gospel, and the method of salvation revealed in it." Again, "I think a man should seek nothing in himself, whereupon to build his coming to Christ," etc. Note his ripe Christian scholarship here! "The whole man unregenerate is called flesh, as if he had no immortal spirit, John iii. 6, Rom. viii. 8, because flesh is the predominant part that hath captive a man's reason and will." Again, "you see here two grounds and reasons of the resurrection of the body, *Christ rising* and the *Spirit indwelling*, Rom. viii. 2. Now I find these in the Scriptures made the two fountains of all Christianity both of the first and second restoration." Again, "There is a marriage between Christ and the Church, and this is the great meditation in the Song of Solomon. Poor, poor glimpses these of a great glory; but if they shall lead any to the book itself, they shall not have been set down here in vain. Let his works be read, and every word, Dr. Jas. Walker, of Carnwath, has penned in his *Scottish Theology and Theologians*, shall be confirmed: "He has literary gifts of a remarkable order for his times," and when he died, "he had already won a distinguished place for himself in the theological literature of his country."

A WYCLIFFE MANUSCRIPT.

John Wycliffe died December 31st, 1384, so that the semi-millennial anniversary of his death occurs on the last day of this year. In memory of England's earliest and greatest reformer the British Museum has recently gathered together such of its manuscripts and books as relate to him and shown them to the public in a Wycliffe Exhibition. It may not be generally known that New York City has at least one element of such an exhibition in a Wycliffe manuscript presented by Mr. John Jacob Astor to the Astor Library. Wycliffe's life was one long struggle for right and reform; he was ever active in the cause of true reli-

gion; but his best work was the translation of the Bible. I more than all else to extend his influence for good, and it was the one deed that has immortalized his name. Parts of the Bible, and the Psalms in particular, had been metrically paraphrased or rudely translated before his time, but it was reserved for Wycliffe and his followers to publish the Scriptures complete in English for the first time, to give the common people a Bible in their own language in place of the Latin version that was intelligible to scholars alone. The translation of the New Testament is thought to have been the work of Wycliffe himself, and he doubtless finished also the version of the Old Testament, which another hand had begun, the whole Bible being thus first translated about the year 1380. Not satisfied with his work, Wycliffe probably inspired an immediate revision, which was not completed until about four years after his death. But the earlier version was the only genuine Wycliffe one, the latter being simply a Wycliffite version or the work of his followers.

The publication of a book in the fourteenth century was very different from what it has become since the invention of printing. Then publication meant a multiplication of manuscript copies of the whole or a part of the work, and patient scribes had to toil over every vellum page, relying for their remuneration upon the patronage of the rich and the learned. That the first English Bible was in great demand and was a success is shown by the fact that no less than about one hundred and seventy manuscripts of it have survived the ravages of time and man, most of them, however, being of the later Wycliffite version. Of the genuine early Wycliffe version of the New Testament but seventeen manuscripts are known to be in existence; fourteen of these are in great European public libraries, two are in the private collections of English noblemen, and one is now in the Astor Library. The last mentioned is on vellum, was probably written about the year 1390, and is a small folio volume with two columns to the page. It contains the New Testament complete and is in an excellent state of preservation. It was formerly in the library of the late Thomas Bamister, Esq., of the Inner Temple, London, was collated throughout by the Rev. Josiah Forskal, and Sir Frederic Madden for their great edition of the Wycliffite versions of the Bible, and furnished the only available text for the prologues to some of the Epistles. When Wycliffe was formally declared a heretic, his writings were liable to be burned and destroyed, and the possession of one of them was doubtless attended by no small peril. It was quite natural, therefore, for the owner of a Wycliffe manuscript to appeal to some great personage for protection, to have his property made safer by some noble signature. The manuscript in the Astor Library bears the autograph of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, which may have saved it at many a troubled period and have enabled it to survive for almost five hundred years. In all respects this Wycliffe manuscript is worthy of notice and it is particularly interesting at this time.

THE SERPENT AND THE ADDER.

The East is woefully cursed with poisonous reptile of all kinds. The special point to be observed in the present instance, however, is that the comparison of wine to the serpent begins in the thirty-first verse rather than the thirty-second. This may be seen better in the following rendering of the two verses: "Look not on the wine when it reddeth, when showeth its eye in the cup—glideth smoothly. After that, it biteth like the serpent and stingeth like the hissing-serpent. The word translated "adder" in the ordinary version is elsewhere rendered "cockatrice." It means literally, he "hisses," and it may refer to the small and venomous hissing-serpent found in various parts of the East. Forskal, cited by Smith, mentions among the animals of Arabia, a small serpent answering the description of the bible "hisser." The breath of this serpent, he declares produces irritation upon any part of the body exposed to it. The breath of wine is the breath of the serpent.—S. S. Times.

THE VISITING PREACHER.

Let him guard sacredly the name and position of the pastor. He can easily strengthen the pastor, or can as easily weaken or wound him. Pleasant things spoken of a pastor by an outsider often go a long way with a church. They are the leaven of a precious help, and are often treasured and repeated to the pastor's advantage. It is just as easy to cripple a pastor. He can be criticized or praised so dubiously as to excite suspicion against him. Some ministers have an open ear for picking up ugly reports of a pastor, and then going out and whispering abroad tale of disaffection and trouble. We know a brother who, after spending a day or two in a congregation, some other preacher is almost certain to come away with hideous stories of the man's unpopularity and dissatisfaction. He seems to ferret out all the unlovely secrets of the pastor and his people, and to find wicked joy in spreading them far and wide.—*Unitarian Presbyterian*.