

## THE LATE GEORGE GILFILLAN,

AUTHOR, PREACHER, AND FRIEND.

BY THE REV. JAMES INCHES HILLOCKS.

Our giants are falling one by one. Another great Scotchman is gone, and tens of thousands, far and near, are deeply mourning the loss of one so noble and so brave. Having fought the good fight, the Rev. George Gilfillan, of Dundee, died suddenly on Tuesday morning, August 13, when on a visit to Arnhall, Brechin.

This death has come with a shock of surprise; the illness having been short and sharp. Though he had attained the age of 65, he lately stated that he felt so strong and well that he expected to be able to do a great deal more work, and jokingly added that he had no intention of writing his autobiography for some time. However, on the Thursday before his death he complained of slight indisposition, which, said the Doctor, arose from irregular action of the heart. Quiet and rest were prescribed. The illness proved temporary, and on Sunday he preached in his own church both morning and afternoon as usual. In the afternoon he founded his remarks on Job xiv. 1-2. Viewed in the light of what has taken place, the sermon, the prayers, and the hymns were somewhat singular, all referring to "sudden death,"—while the Organist played the "Dead March" as the preacher left the pulpit never more to return. To his congregation, at least—especially those of them who were then moved by the fervid eloquence of this last and most impressive sermon—it must have been a sight never to be forgotten to see the familiar, yet striking figure of the good man passing slowly along the passage to the vestry to Handel's solemn and thrilling notes in "Saul."

The funeral, too, will long be remembered. All that was mortal was consigned to the grave "under circumstances such as have never been witnessed in Dundee, and which may never again be expected." The greatly and deservedly esteemed widow—one of the best of women—having consented that the funeral should be public, the Provost, and all in authority, made all necessary arrangements in order that the people might have an opportunity of paying their last respect to the memory of their departed friend. The feeling was one, and the expression one,—that of universal mourning; and the fact is on record that "no public event ever before drew together so many thousands of the inhabitants," and "no crowd ever exhibited greater deference or behaved with greater decorum than did the multitudes which lined the streets while the mournful procession passed along." All classes—the merchant magnate, the industrious mechanic, and the bare-headed factory girl—without distinction as to religious opinion, assembled to bid a "final farewell" to one who had so long and so well identified his name and fame with that stirring and expanding town. And now all that is mortal of that valiant Soldier of the Cross lies in the Balgay Cemetery amid pretty flower plots.

His presence is gone, but not his power for good. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord . . . and their works do follow them." The unfading truth of this cheering fact is being daily proved in thousands of cases in our every-day life; but this becomes all the more evident when a Thomas Chalmers, a Thomas Guthrie, a Norman Macleod, a Thomas Binny or a George Gilfillan dies. Such great and gifted men are special and lasting blessings from our wise and loving Father.

From the beginning of his grand career, it is evident that high resolve as well as high ambition, urged him on in his noble work. It is also evident that he was blessed by bodily strength in no ordinary degree, and this enabled him to bear up most wonderfully under the strain of continuous mental activity. The material frame being equal to the burning zeal and intellectual vigour, he could work, and did work, almost without ceasing; and, being ardent as well as strong, cheerful as well as brilliant, he pressed on higher and yet higher, adding and adding to the lengthening of the roll of his marvellous achievements.

This bright roll is so long that, with almost literal truth, it may be said to be endless. Take his literary efforts as an indication of his super-abundant labours. He is the author of "Five Discourses"; "Hades, or the Unseen"; "Galleries of Literary Portraits," 3 vols.; "Essay on British Poetry," prefixed to "British Poesy," by Tegg, London; "Lives of Poets, Critical Dissertations, &c." prefixed to Nichol's edition of "British Poets," 48 vols.; "The Grand Discovery, or the Fatherhood of God"; "The Groans of Creation, and the Glorious Liberty of the Children of God," 1853; "Approaching and Inevitable Doom of Popery"; "Christian Bearings of Astronomy"; "Righteousness of Defensive War"; "Memoir and Romance of the Rev. J. C. Houston, Newcastle"; "The Bards of the Bible"; "Martyrs, Heroes, and Bards of the Scottish Covenant"; "Burke as an Historian"; "The Last Comet"; "History of a Man," 1856; "Christianity and Our Era"; "Debasing and Demoralizing Influence of Slavery"; "Alpha and Omega," 2 volumes, 1860; "Remoter Stars in the Church Sky"; "Modern Christian Heroes"; "Night," a poem; and "Life of Sir Walter Scott." He has also written prefaces to numerous works of other authors. In some cases he has undertaken the Editorship, and in this too he has bestowed no little care, as in "Life Struggles." In this, and other ways, he has been instrumental in helping many, such as Alexander Smith, the author of "Life Drama," and Sydney Dobell. And to all this it should be added that he has been a contributor to the "Edinburgh University Magazine," "Tait's Magazine," "Hogg's Instructor," "Ecclesiastic Review," "Critic," "Church Journal," "British Quarterly," "Titan," "Pulpit Analyst," "Forward," and the "Scottish Review." These contributions have not only been numerous and valuable; as a critic, he has also acquired great distinction. And to all this, it is likely that more will soon be added. He had quite completed his new "Life of Burns." And, when death came, he was writing another work, which he regarded as most important of all, from a literary point. He had written it twice over before this third and last time of revision.

But Gilfillan was not only an authority of high standing and of great value, he was also a soul-stirring preacher. They are greatly mistaken who think, as some have said, that Gilfillan's rare talents and glowing genius might have been more usefully employed than in the pulpit. By his pen, his power and character have been felt for good; but his career as a Minister of the

Gospel has not only been comparatively protracted, his ministry has been uniformly brilliant. We know that his sermons not only richly provided for the intellectual cravings which led many to listen to the simple beauty or elaborated grandeur as it came flowing like the gentle stream or rushing like the cataract;—we know his sermons and lectures instructed as well as charmed, that they moved the heart and inspired the soul of the enraptured hearers;—we know it was well to be there, for God was there. Gilfillan's thoughts, like his diction and eloquence, were of the highest order. He was impulsive, perhaps rather much so. He never hesitated to say what he thought; sometimes it might have been without due consideration. To a fault, it may be, he was impatient of shams. All, this, together with a desire to be true and faithful to his flock, no doubt, led him to err at times, in saying what some of his warmest friends regretted; but in the main his better nature and broader sympathies stood out free and unfettered. He believed and lived in Jesus. He loved and lived, and declared the gospel of God to perishing souls. The two last sentences he uttered on earth tell what the great, good man was. During his few dying minutes (about thirty), his saintly and precious help-meet said, "Christ is with you, George?" He replied, "Oh, yes; I believe in God in Christ." "I am dying, doctor," he then said. The doctor gave an affirmative answer, and the obedient, confiding servant of God added, "The will of the Lord be done."

And once more, for we must be brief. Many will understand what we mean when we say George Gilfillan was a friend as well as an author and a preacher. We have already indicated as much in referring to the help he has so readily rendered; help, the value of which cannot be told. Like other generous men of mind and energy, he had an inner and an outer life. By this we do not merely mean the spiritual and the physical; we rather refer to the fact that while much of what has been said and written has become widely known, there has also been much done by him that is only known to God and those more immediately concerned. And this suggests a question—certainly an important one to all Christian workers—namely, Which of these two classes of blessings will be more fruitful and durable, the public or the private?

The intensity of his soul, and the warmth of his heart were not confined to the open frankness of the orator and writer. In private, his simplicity, as well as his brilliancy, came out in rich profusion, while his loving and genial nature imparted an exhilarating influence on all around. Though one could not help seeing that he loved best to talk of the poets and their poetry, and though he was at home on almost all the theological and political topics introduced by the friends present, yet he could also engage in the conversation on domestic matters so intelligently and so heartily that it soon became evident that he knew the realities of life as well as its poetry, that his kind heart was overflowing with genuine sympathy towards the poor plodders of everyday life. To those who knew him not in private, it was natural to suppose that his bright genius and remarkable gifts, his strong and generous impulses were given exclusively to public efforts; this was not so. With tongue and pen he honestly and strenuously sought to break down bigotry and superstition, to promote spiritual freedom, and retain civil liberty; but those who knew him best found in him an earnest pastor and a true friend. If we are not mistaken—and we have had ample opportunity of arriving at a correct conclusion—next to his desire to help the poor to help themselves was his love for the true and upright whose aim was to better mankind.

As was said of another, it may be truly said of the late George Gilfillan, take him all in all, it will be long ere we see his like again.

## "TRUE SABBATARIANISM."

Sunday observance is a matter which well meaning people are specially open to consider just at this season of the year, when holidays are in order. Nearly every one who is possessed of the means, and can by any possibility afford himself the leisure, has either been indulging in some relaxation from the cares of his business or profession, or is about to do so. Now, such relaxation can hardly be attained amid our usual surroundings, where the echo of our daily avocations continually haunts our ears. We flee to other scenes, more or less distant, to try there to forget old habits, to imbibe fresh air for the natural man, and inhale new ideas,—the breath of life to our intellectual nature. In accomplishing this process we frequently find ourselves strangely forgetful, amid our new surroundings, of modes of Sunday observance which are largely the result of habit. In the life we are accustomed to lead, these Sundays come in with monotonous regularity as a part of our weekly programme, and are observed weakly, because there is nothing at all distinctive about them. This part of what we are complimentary enough to call "the Kingdom of Heaven" comes upon us with no special violence, and we certainly do not take hold of it with much force. We are a little surprised perhaps, if we will but confess it, to find how extremely little we miss our orthodox Sunday, and how slightly the want of it affects our normal state of being, physical, spiritual or celestial. If we do miss anything at all it is the eloquence, graceful oratory, or hearty good-will breathed forth on our minds and hearts by some favourite preacher, or the exquisite service of song, or the cheerful, pleasant, congenial society of friends whom we are accustomed to meet on that day; but, if the change of scene please and interest us, such retrofections are but a passing sentiment,—a graceful tribute to the pleasures of the past, bringing with it a sense of calm satisfaction in the thought, that when satiated with the balmy present, we can, at will, regain the past.

May there not be some cause for this easy indifference? Is it right that it should be so with us? It would seem to be an inevitable corollary, either that such indifference is wrong, or else that all this zeal for Sunday observance and diligent church-going is simply a sham, satisfies no real want, and can consequently be easily dispensed with. Were Christianity really an energy, such as a recent sermon in these columns justly describes it, would not men hunger for their weekly supplies of force, and indeed hardly dare to convey themselves far from the fountain whence they draw their supplies, even for a single day? What are rest, comfort, or pleasure compared to that which is our very life, that energy by which we live and move and have our being?

Observation of the conduct of Christians on this question forces upon us