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REVIEWS

## AN OLD SCOTCH WORTHY.

By Rev. J. A. R. Dickson, D.D.

Among the many great men of the Scotch Church John Welch, of Ayr, stands pre-eminent, both on account of his spirit and his work. He was a nobleman by birth, a nobleman in soul, a nobleman in service. His father was the Laird of Collieston in Nithsdale. He was born in 1570. In his early boyish days he was self-willed and unmanageable. He left school and joined himself to a band of thieves on the English border, and abode with them till his fine clothes were reduced to rags and he himself to repentance. Then he turned his face homeward, but having grievously offended his father, and nearly broken his heart, he did not dare to come into his presence; hence he sought the intervention of his aunt in Dumfries, a Mrs. Agnes Forsyth, who was fortunate in securing a favorable opportunity to effect a reconciliation, which was done, not without difficulty.

Many a day has dawned dimly that has brightened into sweet, clear light e'er noon, so was it with John Welch. He repented sincerely of his early indiscretion, and besought his father to send him to college. His father's entire reconciliation was shown by his yielding to his request, which meant much, as it involved him in a large outlay for his education and maintenance while pursuing his studies. We have no information touching his college course, only this faintest of all glimmering lights, "he became a diligent student, of great expectation, showing himself a sincere convert; and so he proceeded to the ministry." His first charge was Selkirk. And his life was so exemplary that few were pleased with him, indeed we are told that he "was always attended by the Prophet's shadow, the hatred of the wicked." Here his prayerfulness became manifest. He was wont to lay his Scotch plaid above his bed-clothes when he retired, so that it might be ready to wrap about him when he prayed during the night, which he did often, for from the beginning of his ministry to his death, he reckoned the day ill-spent if he stayed not seven or eight hours in prayer. As a man of prayer, he was full of activity. He preached once every day, and spent his whole time in spiritual exercises. His ministry here was not without fruit. But he was driven from Selkirk by a man named Scott, who maliciously killed two good horses that he kept for his own use. When he was preparing to leave, he could find no one to remove his furniture except a man named Ewart, who said of him, "He was a type of Christ," by which he meant that he imitated Christ. He had at least won his heart. He was called to Kirkcudbright, where he was used to the conversion of many. Before long he was invited to Ayr in 1590, which then was a town so wicked and so set against godliness that no one would let him a house to dwell in, so that he had to abide for a time with John Stuart, an eminent Christian merchant there, who assisted him much in his work. The town was divided into factions, which led to fighting in the streets, resulting in blood, and his first work was that of peace-maker. He would rush among the combatants and separate them, his head protected by a helmet, but no weapon in his hand. His custom on such occasions was, when he had ended the fray and reconciled those who had been engaged in it, to spread a table

in the street and gather the brawlers about it, and beginning with prayer make them profess themselves friends, and then eat and drink together concluding with a psalm. Here was the fatherly love of the prayerful spirit, and it was of such weight with the riotous people that they gradually came to imitate him in his peaceable, holy life. Here he preached every day, and prayed one-third of the time. Sometimes, before he preached, he would send for his elders and tell them he was afraid to go to the pulpit because he found himself sore deserted, he, therefore, desired one or more of them to pray, and then he would venture to preach. He would often retire to the church, which stood at some distance from the town, and spend the whole night in prayer. He married Elizabeth Knox, the daughter of John Knox, the Reformer. She was a worthy wife of a worthy man, a woman who had much of her father's spirit in her. He was accustomed to rise often during the night to pray, and was wont to say that he wondered how a Christian could lie in bed all night and not rise to pray. One night he rose and went into the next room, where he stayed so long at secret prayer that his wife, fearing he might catch cold, was constrained to rise and follow him, and as she listened she heard him speak as by interrupted sentences: "Lord, wilt Thou grant me Scotland?" And after a pause, "Enough, Lord, enough." She asked him afterwards what he meant by saying, "Enough, Lord, enough." He was not pleased with her curiosity, but told her he had been wrestling with the Lord for Scotland, and found there was a sad time at hand, but that the Lord would be gracious to a remnant. This was when prelay invaded Scotland and corrupted the Church. In 1602 the General Assembly meeting at Holyrood House, with the king's consent, appointed their next meeting, of themselves, to be held at Aberdeen in July, 1604. The meeting was prorogued by the king till 1605, and then by another letter from the king absolutely discharged and prohibited, without naming any day for another assembly, his intention being to do away with them altogether if he could. Therefore a number of ministers convened at Aberdeen on the first Tuesday of July, 1605, the last day distinctly appointed by authority, and constituted themselves and dissolved. They did no business, but the act was accounted an act of treason, of which all who were there, John Welch among them, were declared guilty, and many of them put in prison. John Welch was sent to Edinburgh Tolbooth, and then to Blackness, and was afterwards banished to France, never again to see Scotland. Many wonderful things are told of John Welch, and not the least of these is that the plague was stayed in Ayr through his prevailing intercession; and that the heir of Lord Ochiltree, when apparently dead for forty-eight hours, was restored to life by his prayers. While he lived in France he preached diligently and prayed incessantly. One night a friar lodged with him, who, next day being asked what entertainment he got, answered, "Very bad, for," said he, "I always held that devils haunted these ministers' houses, and I am persuaded there was one with me this night, for I heard a continued whisper all the night over, which I believe was no other thing than the devil and the minister conversing together." The man to whom the friar told this, said he was much mistaken, and that it was nothing else than the minister at his night prayer. "O!" said the friar,

"does the minister pray?" "Yes, more than any man in France, and if you please to stay another night with him you will be satisfied." The friar stayed, saw and heard for himself, and was convinced. Next morning he confessed his ignorance of true religion, asked to be instructed, and became a Protestant. How mighty is the power of prayer! It lifted Welch above the fear of man when he preached before the University of Saumur in France, and it made him bold to speak the truth to King Louis XIII., and his servant, Duke D'Esperon. Do we ask how? This is our own answer, "He was so filled with the dread of God, that he had no apprehensions for man at all." His knees were horny through constant kneeling, but his spirit was sweet and gracious, through answers to his prayers. The custom of communion with God revealed itself in his last sickness, when he was overheard to utter these words: "O, Lord, hold thy hand, it is enough; thy servant is a clay vessel and can hold no more." David Dickson, minister of Irvine, and greatly owned of God in his work, was frequently heard to say, where people talked to him of the success of his ministry, that "the grape gleanings in Ayr in Mr. Welch's time were far above the vintage of Irvine in his own."

Would that John Welch's spirit were breathed into the ministers of our day! This is urgently needed. More prayer! more prayer! Many a sermon, many a visit, many a word spoken by the wayside, many a kindness, are lost for want of earnest, believing prayer accompanying them. In our work we are too much alone. Listen to these words of Welch's exposition of Ephes. vi. 18: "The seventh and last part of the armour is prayer, and it is put in the last room, because without prayer all the rest will do no good; prayer teacheth thee how to wear all the rest of thy armour; prayer teacheth thee how to put it on, and how to keep it on when thou hast it; so prayer is the most effective grace of them all. Moses' prayer did more than Joshua and all the chosen men of Israel could do against the Amalchites, for when Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed, but when he let his hands down, Amalek prevailed. Exodus vii. 9. Even so in the hour when thou faintest in prayer, then the devil prevails, but as thou growest in prayer so grace groweth for thee and increaseth in thee. The very sparks of fire of the seal and love of God, which the Holy Ghost puts in thy heart, He puts them in especially when thou art praying, so great is the force of prayer. . . . Do this, and thou shalt do all the rest. Therefore he puts this last as the most needful, and without which the rest can do no good; because it is not thy former graces, that is, it is not thy truth, it is not thy righteousness, it is not the promises, it is not thy faith, it is not thy hope, nor is it the word, that will sustain thee in the day of thy temptation, if thou wantest prayer. Why? Because new temptations must have new graces, and by prayer only the graces of God are renewed." Call upon me, saith the Lord, "in the day of trouble and I will hear thee." . . . Suppose thou hast truth in the inner man, yet there is always a law in thy members rebelling against the law of thy mind. Suppose thou hast righteousness in one part of thy heart, yet there is unrighteousness in another part of it. Suppose thou hast faith, yet it is always mixed with doubtings." And so he proceeds, instancing hope, the word in the mouth and their opposites, and