

A Reminiscent Gossip About Famous Preachers.

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NO. I.

I fear the title of this article will cause the reader of it to attribute to its writer patriarchal length of days. The word *reminiscent* calls up the idea of one who is living more in the past than in the future; while the word *gossip* is suggestive of garrulous age. Let me hasten to assure my friends that though I have for some time been reverend, I am far from being venerable. Having been, however, deeply interested in preachers from early youth, my memory easily grasps a quarter of a century, into which space not a little of history is crowded. As I peer into "the dark backward and abysm of time," well-known and well-beloved forms and faces emerge, and stand out clearly before my mental vision. And, as I gaze upon that goodly company, I involuntarily exclaim: "There were giants in the earth in those days." With Spurgeon in London, Dale in Birmingham, Mursell in Leicester, Chown in Bradford, Hugh Stowell Brown in Liverpool, and (happily, still living) Alexander MacLaren in Manchester,—were ever a nation's pulpits more nobly manned?

I have a recollection of one famous preacher which seems to link me on to days even still more remote. I once beheld that renowned word-painter and philanthropist—Thomas Guthrie. As a boy I saw him in company with Mr. Spurgeon; he was just stepping into the carriage of the great Baptist divine. I think no one else was in the immediate vicinity. There were only us three: Guthrie, Spurgeon and myself—as of one born out of due time. I will not dwell upon the significance of such an association; modesty bids me refrain. I well remember the tall, erect figure, the fine benevolent countenance, and the silvered head of the Edinburgh pastor. Alas, it was not my good fortune to hear him preach. Those who were thus privileged have given us their impressions of the wizardry of his style; his wealth of illustration, his glowing periods, and his wonderful powers of description. I have lately been looking into his "Gospel in Ezekiel." I must confess that its efflorescence of language somewhat palls upon me. Ah, but it must have been glorious to have heard those sermons delivered as only their author could deliver them. We know that print can never do justice to the most effective pulpit eloquence. Cold, dull, lifeless letter-press can never be an adequate substitute for the living and God-animated presence of the ambassador of Christ.

Doubtless thousands in Canada have most pleasant and grateful memories of William Morely Punshon—better known in late life as Dr. Punshon. He spent some years in this country, where the reputation he had gained in England was grandly maintained. I did not hear him until his return to Great Britain, when probably he had passed the meridian of his oratorical power. But Punshon in his decline was superior to most men in their full-orbed glory. What a charm there was about his speaking! What a name his was to conjure with it! One of the bitterest disappointments of my young life was connected with one of his public appearances. I sadly remember being one of a mass of belated unfortunates who stood outside Exeter Hall when he was the chief speaker at some great meeting. Though we were there before the advertised hour, we learned to our chagrin that the house was already crowded, the door was shut and we were debarred from participation in "the feast of reason and the flow of soul." It is likely that such an experience made me more alert and fore-handed thereafter. I certainly heard the eloquent Methodist on several occasions. I must have been one of his most devoted admirers, for I appear to have followed him all over London. I distinctly recollect listening to him in churches situated in the north, south, east and west of the Metropolis. I would gladly travel again to all points of the compass within such a radius could I be as well repaid. How delightful 'twas to sit beneath the spell of such a master of the art of rhetoric!

Like many other celebrated speakers, his appearance was not prepossessing. He was a large man, stout, almost awkward, with heavy face. Nor was his voice naturally musical, or attractive, though he used it with surprising effect. The hearer soon forgot any unfavorable first impression produced by the outward man, as the orator became transfigured by the kindling fervor of his eloquent speech. The auditor had to yield himself up a happy captive to the sweet sway of the "Methodist Chrysothom," as there fell upon the ear in wave after wave of melodious sound the silvery cadences of well-balanced sentences.

Great preacher as was Punshon, it was as a lecturer that he specially excelled. Upon the lecture platform I have never heard his equal. Hundreds of audiences were thrilled and inspired as under his skilled guidance they stood with the prophet amid the sublimities of Horeb, or watched John Bunyan in his prison cell at night-fall, as "beating over him a storm of inspiration, he graves his own heart upon the page," or sat with Macaulay, the historian, in his study, or stood with Macaulay, the statesman, in the senate, or followed the ministrations of

John Wesley through his world-wide parish, or wandered through Florence—people! once more with its illustrious citizens of many generations, or fought over with Wilberforce the battles of freedom, or witnessed with shuddering dismay the diabolical massacre of St. Bartholomew, or shared the trial and triumph of Daniel in Babylon, or sailed the wintry sea with the Pilgrim Fathers. Such a series of word-pictures, graphic delineations, forcibly-put lessons, and magnificent perorations were surely never compassed by any man.

Though I heard him preach frequently, and have read almost all his lectures, it was my privilege to hear the delivery of his one,—"The Men of the May-Flower." What an intellectual treat, that was! How oblivious I was to the dull aspect of the historic Weigh House Chapel, then nearing its demolition, as there rose to view scene after scene in the fortunes and journeyings of those fathers of a new race. The best remembered of the many splendid passages was that ushered in by the words: "Come with me into the cabin of the May-flower, and let us study those men over whom, all unconsciously to themselves, the Star of Empire hangs." Then ensued, in rapid succession, brief but striking portraits of the principal passengers on the immortal ship. We could actually see the men in the very habit as they lived! There stands before me even as I write one of those characters. There he is "with impatient look, as if he pined through the months of inaction, chafing for very weariness of the monotonous sea, the great captain himself, the redoubtable Miles Standish."

And do I not now hear ringing in my ears part of that poetic apostrophe which stirred our hearts to their depths?

"Sail on, sail on, deep-freighted
With blessings and with hopes;
The saints of old with shadowy herds
Are pulling at your ropes.

"Sail on! the morning cometh,
The port ye yet shall win;
And all the bells of God shall ring
The good ship bravely in."

I should like to have said something concerning Punshon's relations to Spurgeon, which were of the most friendly character, though their respective admirers sometimes regarded the two men as rivals. For want of space I must forbear to dwell upon that and much else. To write all that occurs to me I shall require an entire number of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR. I fain would have lingered longer over Dr. Punshon's feats of eloquence, which are fast becoming traditional. Suffice it to say that, with all his great gifts and brilliant achievements, he was a humble and faithful servant of Christ. His dying words were significant of his whole life and ministry: "I feel that Jesus is a living, bright reality. Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

Another Methodist preacher of an altogether different type was the late Peter Mackenzie. Though not so widely known by the outside world, he was almost equally popular in his own communion. In the north of England especially, an announcement that he would preach or lecture was sufficient to attract an immense concourse. He was an eccentric character, with many oddities of gesture and speech, underlying which was a vein of true genius. His manner showed few traces of culture, though his matter gave evidence both of reading and thought. In person he was inclined to corpulency, with a full, round face, radiant with geniality and grace. He seemed to beam upon his audience, and his good humor was infectious. That he enjoyed religion there could be no question. The way in which he interjected the reading of a hymn, or punctuated a prayer, with a resonant "Hallelujah," or "Glory to God!" indicated that he was not merely uttering a denominational formula, but giving vent to the welling up of deep, spiritual feeling. I see him yet, as down on one knee, with hand raised above his head, he pleads with the Lord. He was a man of prayer; like Jacob he wrestled, and like Israel he prevailed.

I heard him on three of his few visits to London; once in a sermon and twice in a lecture. His sermon was characteristic; fervent of spirit, racy of speech and abundant in action. The text was, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." He pointed out that the godly were truly wise. "Some men," said he, "make a boast that they are not religious; they might as well boast of not being honest." To be destitute of religion was anything but creditable to a man's character or intellect. The preacher made some good hits in that part of his subject. He was quite happy, too, in his exposition of "the brightness of the firmament." He made us realize how much more pure, beautiful and immaculate were God's works than those of man. The firmament never needed white-washing, and those who reached heaven would never become defiled again. In dealing with turning sinners to righteousness he expatiated on the influence of a pious mother's example, and in so doing used a most homely illustration. He told us that he had seen a calf closely following a cart, and could not understand its conduct until he observed within the vehicle the remains of a cow. Related by some men such an incident would have

sounded rather ludicrous, but it was in keeping with Peter's style, and he employed it with telling effect.

In a lecture he gave himself free play, and required quite a space in which to operate. Every detail was acted out, and though his dramatizing was crude and not a little grotesque, it held the attention of the audience unwearied from beginning to end. Most of his lectures were on Biblical themes, and he made the old stories extremely realistic. Like Moody, he dressed his heroes in modern costumes and caused them to speak idiomatic, and, now and again, alangy English. I heard his lectures on "Job" and "Naaman." Both those ancient worthies lived over their experiences again, and henceforth were something more than dim figures of old time history.

Peter McKenzie had a great fund of mother-wit. Preaching once on David and Goliath, he said that when the stone struck the giant he felt rather queer, for "such a thing had never entered his head before." There was once a very popular song with the refrain, "Not for Joseph." At a time when it was being sung on every street, Peter was addressing a congregation of working men. His subject was the temptation of Joseph, and he said that when that young man was solicited to evil he replied, "Not for Joseph." He advised his hearers to do likewise. He was wont to introduce his lecture on the "Tongue" with the remark: "This is my most popular lecture; in fact it is in everybody's mouth." Like many other eccentric preachers he was a man of much spirituality, and his memory is blessed.

English Midlands and Lakes.

W. H. WARREN.

The rural scenery in England is very pretty. Long lines of luxuriant trees, neat roads, trim hedges, and tasteful homesteads give a peculiar charm to the landscape. In the southern shires the land is generally level and highly cultivated; but in the north we meet with hills and dales, crags and gorges, and regions of country not capable of thorough tillage.

In passing through the midland shires we notice many towns of greater or lesser importance. Whilst at Windsor we visited Stoke Pogis, the home of the poet Gray for many years. There we saw the venerable church in which he worshipped and the old elm under the shade of which he wrote his immortal Elegy. There, too, was the humble monument which marks his resting place.

Bedford, the scene of good John Bunyan's imprisonment, was visited on our northward journey. A vacant corner is all that is left of the old prison house; but a meeting house near by and a fine monument in another spot indicate the change which has come over the public mind respecting the distinguished dreamer. We walked a mile or two to see his cottage at Elstow and to get a glimpse of the church, whose bells he used to ring when a boy, and of the Moot-house in which he afterwards preached. Noble Bunyan! His persecutors are forgotten, but his name grows more and more famous.

We pass by Kettering, where William Carey's great modern missionary enterprise was inaugurated. At the Baptist Missionary Rooms, London, we had seen a number of very interesting memorials of Carey; but this town seemed a more imposing monument of his missionary zeal.

By a branch line we make a short visit to Olney, for many years the home of the poet Cowper. The town is quaint and ancient. We visit the house, now vacant, in which the poet resided with Mrs. Unwin. Here we see his study, the place where he kept his rabbits, and other rooms occupied by him. In the little den, known as his summer house, we sit down amid the memorials of the many poems he composed there. Near by is the old parish church and the burial place of Rev. John Newton, whose hymns form so valuable a part of our service of song.

Newstead Abbey, the early home of Lord Byron is next visited. The fine estate of the author of *Childe Harold* has undergone great changes since his day. It is now pitted with mines and railway stations. The Abbey is in good preservation. We call at Hucknall Torkard to see the spot where the distinguished poet was buried.

At the large city of Nottingham we spend some time, visiting its Castle containing a vast collection of military curiosities, and rambling among its lace factories. Here Charles the First unfurled his banner to resist the revolutionary armies of his times; and many a bloody conflict was waged in the vicinity of this city.

As we proceed northward we notice that the landscape becomes more rugged and less fertile. Towns are seen nestling among the hills, and the smoke of numerous factories and mining establishments fills the air. The sources of Britain's wealth