

FLETCHER OF MADELEY.

(From "Pictures of Christian Life" by R. A. Wilton, B.A.)

John Fletcher was born at Nyon, a town lying to the north of Geneva, September 12th 1729; there his early days were spent. Having made some progress in the acquirement of knowledge, he was transferred to Geneva, where he obtained some academic distinctions. His industry was great and constant. He devoted the day to study, and a large portion of the night to the composition of a commentary upon what he had seen or read. From Geneva he went to Leinzburg, a town in the Swiss Cantons, where he learned the German language, and extended his intercourse with books; and when he returned to Nyon, he applied himself to the acquisition of Hebrew and mathematics.

From his earliest dawn of understanding, Fletcher seems to have been impressed with the beauty and the excellence of a religious life. He was familiar with the Scriptures, and endeavoured to govern his conduct by their precepts. He even ventured to rebuke others, and his reproof to a visitor, at the house of his sister, has been preserved. Heaven does, indeed, in the words of our greatest living poet, let about us, but rarely do we walk worthy of the light which surrounds us. The white garments of childhood and youth are often spotted in the crowd. It is an admirable observation of Archbishop Leighton, that, as in the faces and manners of some children, presages of future dignity have sometimes appeared, so in the children of God we often discover, by looking back to their youth, the evidence of a heavenly birth.

The purity of Fletcher's character was accompanied by an eager courage, that prompted him to undertake many innocent but dangerous tasks. The following incident is very naturally related by his own pen. "Some years since, I lived at a place very near the river Rhine. In that part it is broader than the Thames at London Bridge, and exceedingly rapid. But having been long practised in swimming, I made no scruple of going into it at any time; only I was always careful to keep near the shore, that the stream might not carry me away. Once, however, being less careful than usual, I was unawares drawn into the mid-channel. The water there was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse. I endeavoured to swim against it, but in vain, till I was hurried far from home. When I was almost spent, I rested upon my back, and then looked about for a landing place, finding I must either land or sink. With much difficulty I got near the shore; but the rocks were so rugged and sharp, that I saw if I attempted to land there I should be torn to pieces. I was constrained to turn again to the mid-stream. At last, despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine smooth creek, into which I was wofully carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I did not then know to be a powder-mill. The last thing I can remember was the striking of my breast against one of the piles whereon it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more till I rose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself I was in a calm safe place; perfectly well, without any soreness or weariness at all. Nothing was amiss, but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore; one gentleman in particular, who said, 'I looked when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side; and the time of your being immersed among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.'

The Church appeared, to the friends of Fletcher, to present the most favourable field for the useful employment of his talents and acquirements. His own inclination, however, selected the army; a choice partly influenced by his high reverence for the ministerial office, and partly by those insuperable objections to the service of India, which he never ceased in after life to maintain, against every opponent. His relations did not encourage his preference, and Fletcher, travelling to Lisbon, enlisted in the service of the king of Portugal. A fortunate accident prevented him from fulfilling his intention; and the ship, in which he was to have embarked, sailed to Brazil without him.

After another unsuccessful effort to enter the army of Holland, he visited England; and, having made himself acquainted with our language and literature, he was appointed, in 1752, tutor to the sons of Mr. Hill, a gentleman of fortune and influence, who resided in Shropshire.

The military ardour of Fletcher seems to have died away, as wider and juster views of the priestly office were unfolded to his meditation. The origin of his strict observance of the Sabbath is traced by his biographers to the accidental reproof of a servant, in the family of Mr. Hill, who found him copying music upon that day. His mind, always serious and reflective, now turned with hope towards the Church, and on the 6th of March, 1757, he was ordained deacon, by the Bishop of Bangor. His heart had already begun to glow with that love of Christ and His Gospel, which renders every worldly object unlovely in the Christian's eyes, except as it is regarded in relation to its author.

Fletcher, when a valuable living was offered to him by Mr. Hill, preferred the poorer parish of Madeley, — a very extensive and populous village, abounding in all those incentives to vice and disorder, which collieries and iron-works always call into existence. — When he settled in Madeley, in 1760, the village contained eighteen public-houses, and the inhabitants were steeped in poverty, and degraded by ignorance. Nor was their spirit of irreligion a passive spirit; it broke out in violent animosities, and personal insults. Fletcher relates some anecdotes of the inconveniences and the dangers he underwent, in the zealous discharge of his duty. The Christian heaven was small in quantity, but it gradually began to exert its influence. The most furious blasphemers, — zealous in the cause of sin, — were reclaimed by this servant of Jesus; and he, whom the evil spirit had been accustomed to rend and convulse, sat, in gentle submission, at the feet of the Village Pastor. "Last Sunday," Fletcher wrote to Wesley, "I had the pleasure of seeing some in the church-yard, who could not get into the church." He endeavoured by gentleness and persuasion, to remove every possible objection to his mode of instruction, and sometimes preached a sermon of Archbishop Usher, or read one of our simple but vigorous Homilies.

His benevolence was inexhaustible; while two shillings supplied the weekly wants of himself and his housekeeper, he gave of his substance to all who needed it. "The whole rent of his smallest estate in Pays de Vaud were set apart for charitable uses, and he drew so liberally from his other funds, for the same purpose, that his furniture and wardrobe were not spared." His zeal, in relieving the spiritual necessities of his flock, was equally fervent and active. "Because some of his remote parishioners excused themselves for not attending the morning service, by pleading that they did not wake early enough to get their families ready, for some months he set out every Sunday morning at five o'clock, with a bell in his hand, and went round the most distant parts of the parish, to call up the people;" and whenever a congregation could be collected on a week-day, within the distance of fifteen miles, Fletcher joyfully undertook the journey of consolation and instruction.

The education of the younger members of his flock engaged his constant care. In Madeley, three hundred children were taught under his superintendence. His manners were singularly calculated to win the affection, and to awaken the curiosity of his infant audiences. Upon one occasion he was surrounded by several children, and while giving them some wise admonitions respecting their conduct, he observed that

their attention was diverted by a robin, which had flown into the room. "Now I see you can attend to that robin," said Fletcher seizing the circumstance, "well, I will take that robin for my text." And a fruitful text it was; he told them of the harmlessness of that familiar bird, and then showed them that it was nevertheless the object of its Maker's care. In this endearing manner he recommended the doctrines of the Gospel to their understandings, and led, —

"with an easy way, A tax of profit from their very play."

Labour, so severe, combined with a mode of life so self-denying as Fletcher's, gradually undermined his health, and symptoms of consumption alarmed his friends. In the spring of 1770, he commenced a journey, which occupied five months, through Switzerland and Italy; and there is something very interesting in his visit, upon foot and alone, to the Protestants of the Cevennes mountains, and in his brief sojourn among those simple cottagers. He gained strength and vigour from this tour; and towards the close of 1775, we find him telling Wesley, that old age crept on him in quick strides. "I am already so grey-headed, that I wrote to my brother to know if I am not fifty-six, instead of forty-six."

He showed, however, no regard to the weakness of his frame, but exposed himself without hesitation, to the most tempestuous weather, and to the most unremitting visitation of the sick, at home he employed fourteen, sometimes sixteen hours of the day in study. His diet might have satisfied the rules of a monastery. A little bread and fruit, or a cup of milk constituted his repast. His friends anticipated a beneficial change in his domestic economy, when in November, 1781, he was married to a lady, whom Wesley describes as having been singularly worthy of his affection. Fletcher speaks of her, as a partner, a sister, a wife, who was not afraid to face with him the colliers and bargemen of his parish. "Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps." Such were his words, — and indeed his own light was already glimmering out, although its flame continued to burn clearly to the end. He was still able to fulfil the pastor's duties, among a people whose hatred had been turned into love. "I sleep in my sentry-box, till Providence removes me; my situation is quite suited to my little strength. I may do as much, or as little as I please, according to my weakness; and I have an advantage, which I can have nowhere else in such a degree; my little field of action is just at my door, so that if I happen to overlook myself, I have but to step from my pulpit to my bed, and from my bed to my grave." That step was too soon to be taken.

One evening in the autumn of 1785, he returned home, after six hours of spiritual labour, and thought he had taken cold, but disregarded it. On the following Sabbath, although suffering from extreme debility, he persevered in performing the service in his church; while reading the prayers, he showed symptoms of exhaustion, but resisted the most earnest exhortations of his wife to relinquish the task. The windows having been opened, he revived, and preached with remarkable force and eloquence upon the mercy of God. After the sermon, he walked to the communion table: "I am going," he said, "to throw myself under the wings of the Cherubim, before the Mercy seat." Here nature fainting again, but

"The wrestling agony of death and life,"

his enthusiastic spirit of religious zeal continued to support him, and while the congregation wept aloud, he distributed, to each devout member of his flock, the bread and wine of Christ's Holy Supper. At length his labour of love was ended, and he was supported into his own dwelling. He lay upon his couch, while his afflicted wife hung over him with tenderness and grief. —

"He closed his eyelids with a tranquil smile, And seemed to rest in silent prayer awhile."

In this condition he remained several days. Though unable to delight his friends by his conversation, he assured them, by signs, of his happiness and his hopes. Death approached him, not as a king of terrors, but as an angel, sent to conduct him to his home.

His look was love, — his salutation peace!

The hour at length arrived, when the burden and the heat were to be over, and the servant was to be rewarded for his toil in the vineyard. The day of temporal repose was the day on which he was for ever to rest from his labours.

Gilpin has drawn a touching picture of the sorrow that pervaded Madeley, while the Village Pastor lay upon his bed of suffering and death. After the evening service, many persons, who had come from remote hamlets, lingered about the parsonage, in the faint hope of obtaining one glimpse of their benefactor and friend, before he was taken from them. Their anxious wish was gratified. "The door of the chamber being set open, immediately before which Fletcher was sitting upright in his bed, with the curtains un-drawn, — unaltered in his usual venerable appearance, — they slowly moved, one by one, along the gallery, severally pausing as they passed by the door, and casting in a mingled look of supplication and anguish." Such a scene might have inspired the pencil of Raphael, and, even in the simple narrative of Gilpin, it calls the tears into our eyes. Upon this same night, about half past ten o'clock, being the 14th of August, 1785, the Village Pastor closed his eyes in sure and certain hope.

The wheels of life stopped beneath the hand of the divine Architect, without a sound. His friends, who encircled his bed, were uncertain whether he yet lingered among them: —

"Every ear Still listened in suspense, of hope and fear; Sublime, ineffable, angelic grace, Beam'd in his meek and venerable face."

These lines were indeed written of one who walked with God, and whom God took to Himself by a glorious translation; but they will not be ill applied to any Christian Enoch, whose eye of faith beheld the heavens opened, and the minister of God descending to bless and to guard his people.

FILIAL GRATITUDE OF BISHOP HURD.

(From the Voice of the Church.)

The following graceful effusion of filial tenderness and gratitude will find a ready echo from the heart of many a poor scholar similarly circumstanced. Instances like this form an unanswerable argument in favour of those noble institutions by which so many ornaments of our Church and nation, otherwise "born to blush unseen," have been from age to age transferred from the humbler walks of life to its highest offices and distinctions.

"I believe I never told you how happy I am in an excellent father and mother, — very plain people you may be sure, for they are farmers, but of a turn of mind that might have honoured any rank and any education. With very tolerable, but in no degree affluent, circumstances, their generosity was such, they never regarded an expense that was in their power, and almost out of it, in whatever concerned the welfare of their children. We are three brothers of them. The eldest settled very reputationly in their own way; and the youngest in the Birmingham trade. For myself, a poor scholar, as you know, I am almost ashamed to own to you how solicitous they always were to furnish me with all the opportunities of the best and most liberal education. My case, in so many particulars, resembles that which the Roman poet describes as his own, that with Pope's wit I could apply almost every circumstance of it. And if ever I were to wish in earnest to be a poet, it would be for the sake of doing justice to so uncommon a

virtue. I should be a wretch, if I did not conclude as he does: —

By kind nature's laws, we might retrace The years allotted to life's fatal race, And letter parents choose to please our pride, Each for himself might, as he would, decide; For me, contented with my lowly sides, Nor thrones nor sceptres would fix my desires.

HORACE, Satires, book 1. sat. 6.

In a word, when they had fixed us in such a rank of life as they designed and believed should satisfy us, they very wisely left the business of the world to such as wanted it more, or liked it better. They considered what age and declining health seemed to demand of them, reserving for themselves only such a support as their few and little wants made them think sufficient.

I should beg pardon for troubling you with this humble history; but the subjects of it are so much, and so tenderly, in my thoughts at present, that if I wrote at all, I could hardly help writing about them."

—Letter from Mr. Hurd to Mr. Warburton.

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From the extensive circulation of The Church, in the Province of Canada, (from the Cape to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and from New Brunswick, in the Hudson's Bay Territories, and in Great Britain & Ireland, as well as in various parts of the United States, it will be found a profitable medium for the advertisement of all articles which are desired to be widely and generally diffused.

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In returning his most sincere thanks to his friends and the public generally, for the liberal support hitherto extended to him, he would beg respectfully to inform them that he has just received (per Great Britain from London,) a large assortment of Goods, adapted for the present and coming seasons, which, for quality and elegance, cannot be surpassed in the Province. Also, materials for University, Barister's, and Clergymen's Robes, from the Cape to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and his Majesty's High Court of Exchequer, Chancery Lane, London. And as the advertiser has had considerable experience in Robe making, as well as all other branches of his business, he hopes, by merit and attention to business, to merit that patronage which it will ever be his study to deserve.

Toronto, May 23, 1844. 385-1f

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THANKFUL to his friends and the public in general for the very liberal support received since he commenced business in this city, begs leave to intimate that he has removed to

No. 4, VICTORIA ROW. (His former Shop having been partially destroyed by the late fire in King Street, where he has, by close diligence and punctuality in business, to merit a continuance of the favours hitherto extended to him.)

Toronto, September 26, 1843. 326-1f

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Toronto, 25th May, 1842. 47-1f

T. M. BURGESS, MERCHANT TAILORS, (LATE G. BILTON) No. 128, KING STREET, TORONTO. 343

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G. T. BILTON, MERCHANT TAILORS, No. 2, WELLINGTON BUILDINGS, KING STREET, TORONTO. [LATE T. J. PRESTON.] 307

RIDOUT & PHILLIPS, WHOLESALE AND RETAIL GROCERS. DEALERS IN WINES AND LIQUORS, Wellington Buildings, CORNER OF KING AND CHURCH STREETS. Toronto, February 2, 1843. 291-1f

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The New Printed Lists, (to be seen at every Post Office and Store in Upper Canada) and any information can be obtained, free of charge, upon application, (if by letter, post-paid) at the Company's Office, Goderich, as regards the Huron Lands — at Frederick Street, Toronto, regarding all other Lands — Remittances and Deposits of Money, &c.

CANADA COMPANY, Frederick Street, Toronto, 2nd June, 1845. 415-1f

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Do...17...1...200

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Do...E. half 7...5...100

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For further particulars, application may be made to THOMAS CHAMPION, Esq., at the office of the Church Society of the Diocese of Toronto, 144, King Street, Toronto, — (if by letter, post-paid.) 408

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC.

THE Sale of the Eleven (say Sixteen, as per hand-bills) BUILDING LOTS, on the East bank of the River Don, near the City of Toronto, advertised in the fourth page of this journal, will be sold by Auction, on TUESDAY EVENING, the 11th day of June next, at EIGHT O'CLOCK precisely, at Mr. Wakefield's Auction Mart.

TERMS: — Only £2 10s. on each lot required down, the remainder can be paid in four equal annual instalments. These Lots are larger, (being from one-fourth to three-fourths of an acre each,) cheaper, (see hand-bills,) and upon easier terms than any lots offered for sale. The soil is well adapted for Pasture, Orchard, or Garden; and those lying at the Margin of the River, are well adapted for the erection of any kind of Machinery propelled by Steam, and would answer well for a Brewery, Distillery, or Tannery. N.B