

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

"WILLIE" ANDERSON.

Of the Rev. William Anderson, LL. D.—affectionately known in Glasgow as "Willie" Anderson—many racy stories are told. He was an original in many respects with a breadth of vision and contempt for conventional forms that made him conspicuous in the Scottish ministry. And, like all originals who said and did things utterly indifferent to what people might think, a good many of his actions were accounted somewhat eccentric.

At one time, for instance, he was preaching in Dundee. Shortly after entering the pulpit the congregation began to speculate what would be the matter when the stranger minister began to make a hurried search under the pulpit cushion, on the floor of the pulpit, and the inside of the Psalm Book and Bible. After an apparently vain search Mr. Anderson announced in stentorian voice, "Freens, I hae lost my specs." Fortunately a member of the congregation was able to supply the reverend gentleman with a pair of spectacles that suited his vision.

Mr. Anderson was a native of Kilsyth. He graduated at Glasgow university, and fresh from college he was called to the pastorate of the Relief Church, in John street, Glasgow. A peculiarity of this church was that at one time almost all the city fleshers worshipped here. They vied with each other in ornamental pews, each upholstering along the wall. For this reason it was said that the lower portion of the church had more the aspect of a theatre than a place of Divine worship. You know how intense was the dislike of the old race of Scottish Presbyterians to "read" sermons. The bitter scorn for a preacher who could not discourse on a text without the use of paper is expressed in scores of pithy anecdotes. But in imitation of Dr. Chalmers, young Anderson began his ministerial career by reading his sermons. This of course, gave great umbrage to many in the congregation, and a whole year passed before the Presbytery would agree to his ordination. Ultimately the opposition gave way, and he was ordained in February, 1822. He remained in John Street church a faithful, intrepid, and successful minister for half a century.

His sensitive nature, however, never allowed him to throw away entirely the recollection of the ungracious treatment he experienced at the outset of his career, and he was wont in later life to repeat with glee the argument of fathers and brethren against the use of the paper in the pulpit. On one occasion he went by the canal boat, having arranged to officiate at Kirkintilloch. Among his fellow-passengers was an old Cameronian elder, with whom the minister was soon in conversation. The

talk turned upon Glasgow kirks and ministers. David, for so the elder was called, admitted that he had gone to hear Dr. Chalmers, but only on a week-night.

"He's an awfu' man that," continued the Cameronian. "I never heard a man like him. I was sittin' and before I kent whaur I was, I got up on my very feet, stretchin' o'er the book-board feared I would lose a word. But ca' ye yon preachin'? Na, na it was rank black prelacy. Man, he read every word o't."

"I thought," says Dr. Anderson. "I might have a little banter with the old man, and so I said—

"David, you need not be so hard against prelacy or read sermons, for ye know it is a fact, which you cannot deny, that you read prayers yourself every morning."

"With a smile of contempt, mixed with pity, the old man fixed his eyes on me and replied in a solemn tone—

"Laddie, ye'll no ken wha I am, or ye wdna speak that way; for onybody that kens me that has been an elder o' the Cameronian Kirk o' Kirkintilloch for abune thirty years wadna set sic a sin to my door; na, na."

"But, David, I have good ground for what I have said, and I know that you do read prayers every morning."

"At this reiterated charge the old man's wrath began to wax warm, and, rising to his feet, he exclaimed in a passion—

"It's a lee! It's a lee! Whae'er told ye that, I carena', but it's a black lee!"

"Feeling that I had perhaps led him far enough, I said—

"Be calm, David, and answer me a question. Do you not read the Psalms of David every morning?"

"To be sure I do!"

"Well, David, are not David's Psalms the best prayers ever written?"

"The face of the old Cameronian relaxed into a smile as he sat down and exclaimed—

"Ay, laddie, but ye hae caught me noo; ye hae caught me noo."

"But David," I continued, "I am afraid that from the way you have been talking you do not know what a sermon means."

"I should think," he rejoined, "I should think that the man who has been an elder o' the Cameronian Kirk abune thirty years should ken what a sermon means, if onybody kens."

"Well, David, let me tell you that a sermon is a proclamation. Now, you know when the King makes a proclamation, it is written on paper and read at the Cross, and that it is not a proclamation unless it is read. Now, you know that the Gospel is the proclamation of the King of Kings. Therefore, as all proclamations must be read, so a sermon, being a proclamation, must be read or it is not a sermon."

"David looked dumfounded. The boat had reached our destination and the old Cameronian on stepping on exclaimed—

"Tuts, tuts, laddies; ye hae ower muckle Latin for me."

To every tale of woe Dr. Anderson lent a ready ear, and, as a consequence, he was often sadly imposed upon, both to the loss of his time and means. As a clergyman he took a deep interest in the Jews, and many a wandering son of Israel benefited by his liberality.

It happened that, much about the same time, one Jew after another found his way to the doctor's home, and each, with a pitiful story, besought his commiseration and help. With such visits the good man's patience seems to have been exhausted, for on going into his study one day, when a caller was announced, and finding another dirty-looking representative of the "chosen race," ready with plausible words to call forth his charity, he anticipated him, saying, in a sympathising tone, "Puir Moses, puir Moses!" (referring to the first leader of the Israelites).

The Jew attempted to speak, but he was interrupted by the doctor repeating, "Puir Moses! puir Moses!" Then finally he said, "If I'm bothered this way wi' two or three o' ye, what must Moses ha'e been when he had charge of the whole pack?"

As a preacher Dr. Anderson used to display great warmth, and now and again would cast aside not only his gown, but his wig during the heat of his discourse. His humour was of a quiet but effective kind.

A good-humored maiden lady of a certain age was wont to say that he was the only minister who systematically prayed for the old maids, as he never forgot to supplicate on behalf of "those who have no help of man."

One day Mrs. Anderson having gone out for a little, on her return missed a pair of new boots which had been sent home that morning for the minister, and which she had noticed still on the lobby table when she went out. Proceeding to the study she asked the Doctor if he had seen anything of the boots. "Well, yes," he replied in his own naive way; "there was an auld beggar man asked help, and he was very ill shod, so I gave him the boots!" "But bless me," said the wife, "you might have given him a pair of old ones." "It wasna auld anes he needed," was the Doctor's triumphant reply; "he had auld anes already."

But he could say very hard things. One Sunday, in the course of reading a Psalm, he paused at the words, "He putteth out his money to usury," and said—

"There was once in this church a poor widow, and she wanted 20 pounds to begin a small shop. Having no friends