

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XXIII.—JUNE, 1892.—NO. 6.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—THE MYSTERY OF HEALING.

BY HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., GREENOCK, SCOTLAND.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.—EX. XV. 26.

THIS revelation of the Lord as a healer was a natural sacrament. It was made beside a bitter well, whose waters were made sweet; and the Lord showed the deep significance of the occasion by connecting the great spiritual truth with the natural symbol. It was no chance circumstance that Marah should be the first experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. God placed it there, and led His people up to it designedly, to teach them a profound religious lesson. The bitter well was a representation of the diseases that belonged to their old life in Egypt; and the sweetening of its nauseous waters was a symbol of the removal of these diseases, and their immunity from them, in consequence of obedience to God's laws of holiness and health in the new land and the new life before them. God healed the evil of the natural world as an outward proof that He could heal the deeper and more trying evils of the human world.

We have no reason to suppose that a miraculous efficacy was given to the tree cast into the water for the special purpose of doing what it could not accomplish by its own inherent powers. In nature there are many trees and shrubs which possess the power of precipitating the mineral particles that render water bitter, and making it pure and sweet. We are told that the tea plant was first used in China for the purpose of counteracting the bad qualities of the drinking water, and in that way its stimulating properties were first discovered. The adventurers who first explored the Western lands of America infused into the alkaline water of the prairies a sprig of sassafras or wild sage to purify it; while in India a kind of bitter nut is ground down and mixed with stagnant water, to clarify it and make it wholesome. And a tree with natural properties of a similar kind may have been that which God guided Moses to select. It must have been

faculty for taking infinite pains which Charles Dickens declared to be itself genius—all these, I say, combined will give to any man who wins and wears them a certain independence and a sense of mastery which is much to be coveted. “As for color,” Motley writes about Rubens, “his effects are as sure as those of the sun rising in a tropical landscape. There is something quite genial in the cheerful sense of his own omnipotence.” Yes, and is not the same thing true, only in a still loftier range of action, of the preacher? He who, even in an inadequate measure, has these qualities, can dispense with what Ruskin scornfully calls “the frippery of gay furniture about the place from which the message of judgment must be delivered.” In many of the accompaniments of that message, in its setting—architectural, decorative, musical—there is often a lurking peril. When Rogers wrote verse which the critics refused to call poetry, he summoned his bank account to his aid. “I’ll make them buy my poems,” said he, “even if they won’t read them.” Turner and Stothard were forthwith engaged to illustrate his volumes, and to-day Rogers’ “Italy” in that edition fetches a great price. It is not that purchasers care for Rogers or for Italy, but they know the value of Turner’s glorious vignettes. Alas! for the preacher who needs to have his poor sermon set forth like that. Mr. Bright, sitting to have his portrait painted, looked round on the bare studio and said to the artist, “You do business on a very small capital.” None better than the great orator could have answered himself with Shakespeare, “My mind to me a kingdom is.” The true preacher can make a meeting-house as barren of adornment as was the holiest of all to glow with the splendor of God’s presence. “It is He,” as Dr. Maclaren says, “and not the carven timbers and the jewelled stones which we may bring that makes the place of His feet glorious.”

So far we have been thinking chiefly of the personality of the preacher and the painter. We have glanced at some conspicuous points which the two possess in common. On another occasion we may turn for a little while to the arts themselves.

V.—ON THE STUDY OF LEIGHTON.

BY PROFESSOR J. O. MURRAY, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

COLERIDGE has said, in his *Literary Remains*,* “Surely if ever a work not in the sacred canon might suggest a belief of inspiration, of something more than human, this it is. When Mr. Elwyn made this assertion I took it as the hyperbole of affection; but now I subscribe to it seriously, and blessed the hour that introduced me to the knowledge of the evangelical, apostolical Archbishop Leighton. Next to the inspired Scriptures, yea, and as the vibration of that once-struck hour remains on the air, stands Leighton’s Commentary on the First Epistle of Peter.”

Readers of the “Aids to Reflection” know how many of its most strik-

* Works, vol. 5, p. 364.

ing aphorisms are quoted from Leighton, and as well how his theological temper and method seem to pervade the thinking of that remarkable book. Is Coleridge's estimate of Leighton extravagant, or has it substantial and enduring grounds? Has the "evangelical, apostolical archbishop" any teaching for men to-day, or has he been superseded by the more recent methods in commentary and by the newer commentators? We believe not. Leighton, we think, is among the seventeenth-century authors whom our ministers cannot afford to neglect, and we propose, in this article, to set forth the reasons for this view.

But to know an author we must know something of the man. The main facts in his career can be briefly told. He was born, 1611, in Edinburgh, according to his biographer Pearson, though London has been claimed for his place of nativity. His father, Dr. Alexander Leighton, a Presbyterian clergyman, author of "Sion's Plea against the Prelacie," was made the object of Laud's bitter, unrelenting, and cruel persecution. For publishing this work he was committed to the dungeons of Newgate, haled before the Star Chamber, fined £10,000, pilloried at Westminster, a second time at Cheapside, was whipped, his nose slit, his ears cropped, and after enduring all these barbarities was doomed to languish in the Fleet prison ten years. Robert Leighton was his eldest son. The education of the future archbishop was singularly thorough. He was graduated at the University of Edinburgh in 1631, "having been sent," says Burnet, "to be bred in Scotland." After graduation, and for a period of about ten years, he gave himself to foreign travel and residence. On his return he was ordained over a Presbyterian church at Newbattle in Mid-Lothian, seven miles from Edinburgh, in 1641. Leighton was then thirty years old. He had evidently a wholesome fear of entering on the sacred office at too callow a period, for he is said to have remarked, "Some men preach too soon, and some too long." Of Leighton's pastoral career we have but slight record. One incident has been preserved well worth relating. At a meeting of the Synod he was "publicly reprimanded" for "not preaching up the times." "Who," he asked, "does preach up the times?" The reply was, "All the brethren." "Then," said Leighton, "if you all preach up the times, you may surely allow one poor brother in peace to preach up Christ Jesus and eternity." When in his "Pastoral Care" Bishop Burnet, discoursing of qualities in the true preacher, drew the following picture, he had Leighton in mind, as is clear from the estimate of his preaching given in the "History of his Own Time"—"There is an authority in the simplest things that can be said, when they carry visible characters of genuineness in them. Now, if a man can carry on this method, and by much meditation and prayer draw down Divine influences, which are always to be expected, when a man puts himself in the way of them, and prepares himself for them, he will often feel that *while he is musing a fire is kindled* within him, and then he will *speak with authority* and without constraint; his thoughts will be true

an his expressions free and easy. Sometimes this fire will carry him, as it were, out of himself, and yet without anything that is frantic or enthusiastical. Discussions brought forth with a lively spirit and heat, where a composed gesture and the proper motions of the eye and countenance and the due modulations of the voice concur, will have all the effect that can be expected from anything that is below immediate inspiration."

This is Leighton to the life. The first half of the seventeenth century gave Scotland two remarkable saints as well as preachers in Samuel Rutherford at Anworth and Robert Leighton at Newbattle. As Rutherford went from his beloved Anworth to be Principal of the New College at Aberdeen, so Leighton was transferred from his parish to the University of Edinburgh and made its Principal in 1653. Here he was quite as successful as in his parish work. He was an efficient administrative officer. He showed abilities as an educator. It is recorded of him that he "revived the obsolete practice of delivering, once in the week, a Latin lecture on some theological subject." The hall in which these were given was always thronged, quite as much, we are assured, from the fascination of Leighton's delivery as from inherent interest in theological discussion. But what reads more strangely in this part of his career is that he had administered to James Mitchell, who was concerned in the attempt on the life of the infamous Archbishop Sharp, the Solemn League and Covenant, when Mitchell was a candidate for laurcation at the university in 1656.

Leighton held the post of Principal of the University of Edinburgh till the year 1662. Then occurred that change in his ecclesiastical relations which has been made the subject of very fierce animadversions. He accepted from Charles II. an appointment in the Church of England, first as Bishop and then as Archbishop of Glasgow. He had been for twenty years a Presbyterian of the Church of Scotland. His father, as we have seen, had endured terrible wrongs at the hands of Archbishop Laud. The question is asked, How could he have thus turned his back on his ancestral faith, sealed by his father's sufferings and death, and have taken a post under that very Laud who had hounded his father to his fate? We have no space here to discuss the question. Those who desire to read a temperate and thorough discussion of the matter will find such in an article on Leighton by the late President Woolsey in the *New Englander*, vol. 3. One thing, however, is perfectly clear: Leighton never intended to cast the slightest doubt upon the validity of his Presbyterian ordination. This is made evident by the following extract from Bishop Burnet.* Leighton "did not think orders given without bishops were null and void; he thought the forms of government were not settled by such positive laws as were unalterable, but only by apostolical practices, which, as he thought, authorized episcopacy as the best form. Yet he did not think it necessary to the being of a church. But he thought that every church might make such rules of ordination as they pleased, and that they might reordain

* "History of his Own Time," folio ed., vol. 1, p. 140.

all that came to them from any other church, and that the reordaining a priest imparted no more, but that they received him into orders according to their rules, and did not infer the annulling the orders he had formerly received." On this subject he held the same views as Hooker and other great lights of the English Church.

We have no space, as we have no occasion, to review Leighton's career as a prelate of the Church of England. His fame does not rest on this, but on his writings. That career ended in 1674. While it lasted, Leighton shunned everything that savored of ecclesiastical show and prelatical assumption. He labored to secure the beatitude of the peace-makers. He spent ten years of retracy, first at the University of Edinburgh and then in Broadhurst, Sussex, England, dying at last, in 1684, in London at the Bell Tavern, Warwick Lane. "He used often to say that if he were to choose a place to die in it should be an inn, it looking like a pilgrim's going home, to whom this world was all as an inn, and who was weary of the noise and confusion in it." He added that the officious tenderness and care of friends was an entanglement to a dying man, and that the unconcerned attendance of those that could be procured in such a place would give less disturbance.

Leighton's life falls thus into the following periods : That of his early training ; that of his foreign travel and residence ; that of his pastorate at Newbattle ; that of his principalship of Edinburgh University ; that of his prelatical career ; and finally that of his retracy. What we wish to mark is that in them all he was the saintly man. In the close of his treatise on the "Pastoral Care," Bishop Burnet gives this estimate of Leighton, which will stand as no overdrawn portrait of the man : "I have now laid together with great simplicity what has been the chief subject of my thoughts for above thirty years. I was formed to them by a bishop that had the greatest elevation of soul, the largest compass of knowledge, and the most mortified and most heavenly disposition that I ever yet saw in mortal ; that had the greatest parts, as well as virtues, with the perfectest humility that I ever saw in man, and [who] had a sublime strain in preaching, with so grave a gesture and such a majesty both of thought, of language, and of pronounciation, that I never once saw a wandering eye when he preached, and have seen whole assemblies often melt in tears before him ; and of whom I can say, with great truth, that in a free and frequent conversation with him for above two-and-twenty years, I never knew him say an idle word, [or one] that had not a direct tendency to edification ; and I never once saw him in any other temper but that I wished to be in in the last minutes of my life."

There are two lines on which Leighton deserves to be studied by the preachers of to-day. One is homiletical ; the other is exegetical. In both these regards he is widely differenced from preachers and exegetes of the present time. This, however, is no reason for dropping his study ; may, indeed, be a reason for pursuing it, since there is no reason to suppose

that the preachers and expositors of any one age monopolize all the excellences of their vocations. As a preacher, Leighton lends his influence to those who hold that sermons should not be *read* by the preacher. In this respect he can hardly be considered as an extempore speaker. His practice seems to have been a *memoriter* speaking. "I know," he said, "that weakness of memory is pleaded in excuse for this custom [viz., reading the sermon]; but better minds would make better memories. Such an excuse is unworthy of a man, and much more of a father, who may want vent indeed in addressing his children, but ought never to want matter. Like Elihu, he should be refreshed by speaking." He, in a number of his sermons, has an introduction before announcing the text. The practice has this merit at least—it serves to rivet attention on the text. It is difficult to see why preachers should be so bound by hard-and-fast rules. There is no law requiring them to "give out" the text first. Leighton used his common sense, and brought his text in when and where it would best serve the purpose of a text. In fact, the business of preaching from single texts may be somewhat overdone; and the minister will find that if he occasionally departs from a stereotyped method he will be the more likely to gain the attention of his hearers from the start.

Coming now to the elements of his sermons which best deserve and repay study, they are :

1. They are, in style, plain pure English, clear as sunlight, simple in their diction, models of lucidity and purity. The contrast between Leighton and Jeremy Taylor here is striking. Nothing of the latter's soaring rhetoric is ever found in the former. None of the former's excess in learned quotations ever appears. Leighton's only aim is to be plain and weighty. He says nothing for effect. So, on the other hand, he is in contrast, so far as style goes, with preachers like Howe and Baxter, who are careless and involved in style; whose weighty or burning sentences have yet a certain cumbrousness about them which impedes their full effect. A style like that of Leighton resembles far more closely that of the late Cardinal Newman, the praise of whose noble English is in the mouth of all the critics. The resemblance is so close, indeed, that one is tempted to think Newman must have studied Leighton carefully. It is in the thought as much as it is in the style. This severe simplicity of style stands in absolute contrast with what is called in modern phrase "sensational preaching." This, in both its good and its bad sense, has had full sway among us. But there are some signs of reaction. Sure we are that preaching, to reach its best ends, must have a style more like Leighton's and less like that of some modern pew-fillers. There is an essential difference between the two—a moral as well as an intellectual difference. Space does not allow of any quotations to illustrate points; but readers are referred to such sermons as that on "Christ, the Light and Lustre of the Church," or that on "Hope Amid Billows" as examples.

2. The other quality for which Leighton should be studied is his

spirituality. It is not only the sermon, it is the man behind the sermon who determines the spiritual force in any given preaching. In Leighton's time preachers in the English Church were, as a rule, worldly prelates, whose words from the pulpit were cold and dead; and in the Scottish Church they were busy "preaching up the times," with here and there such an exception as Samuel Rutherford of Anworth. If in the sermons of Dr. Robert South, with all their magnificent force and bold indictments of prevalent immorality in the Court, we see a lack of evangelical warmth, we find Leighton's all aglow with it. The spirituality of the preacher's life affects the structure, the thought, the language of his sermons. It gives them intense reality of conviction. He sees into things with a spiritual eye; and we have the vision in the sermon. It is no narrow evangelicalism, harping on a few phrases and dealing with a few topics. It illumines everything. The richness of Leighton's evangelical thought is seen everywhere in his writings; but his sermons especially are full of it. Here is power, but it is power gained not by sheer force of his intellectual perceptions as these were found in a soul born again. It is power gained in a godly life. We have had so much talk about the importance of a minister's being a "man among men" that we may have forgotten the truth that a minister must have a deep spiritual experience if he is to be a preacher in the sense which Leighton embodied, and not a mere filler of pews. And the study of his sermons is a good training school for this divine gift. Leighton as an expositor of Scripture belongs of course to the goodly company of the older commentators. But we make a great mistake if we think these are wholly superseded by the biblical scholars of the present day. Undoubtedly the latter have far more full and accurate knowledge of the sacred languages. The difference is represented at once in the difference between the grammars and lexicons of that day and this. The older exegetes cannot for a moment compare with those of this century in all the minutiae of biblical scholarship. Must they then be shelved? Is Matthew Henry only an antiquarian curiosity—fossil remains of an extinct method? Or have biblical expositors like Henry and Leighton something of permanent value?

1. These men have a way of getting at the "gist" of scriptural teaching which does represent the core and substance of inspired truth. They have what Professor Stuart, of Andover, used to call the "logic of commentary." I am free to say, at the risk of being thought behind the times, that if I wanted to get at the full scope and the whole context in the First Epistle of Peter, I would rather depend on Leighton for it than on Lange. If I wanted light on a vexed passage I should seek Lange rather than Leighton. The reason for this comprehension of the kernel and substance of inspired truth is that they—the older commentators—brought to the study of the Word of God a spiritual illumination, something altogether apart from knowledge of New Testament Greek or Hebrew philology. They were no mean scholars in their day; but to their scholarship they added a

spiritual illumination, an enlightening by the Holy Spirit gained through deep devotion, in which they saw the "mind of the Spirit" as that mind was expressed in the Scriptures they explored. Men like Leighton were, by the very fact of their deep spirituality, brought into such sympathy with inspired truth that their comprehension of it acts like an intuition and is akin—I am not afraid to say it—to inspiration itself.

2. Leighton is of special value in the matter of expository preaching. It is said by one of his biographers that his commentary on the First Epistle of Peter was originally preached to his parish at Newbattle. This seems altogether probable from the form in which it is cast. He has left also other specimens of expository preaching in his expository lectures on Psalm xxxix. and on the first nine chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. While they may be said to lack an illustrative element needful to a mixed audience, they lack nothing which the "spiritual mind" can desire. They would strike deeply responsive chords in any weekly service where Christians come to be built up in their most holy faith.

It would be unjust to Leighton to say that he is wanting in imagery. On the contrary, though sparingly used, it is always of an effective kind. Thus in the expository lecture on Romans xii. 3-12, on the first clauses of verse 3 he uses three telling illustrations. They are not so often sprinkled over his discussions, but they are always apt, and shed light on the passage, as when he says: "Alas! it is an uncomfortable and commonly an unprofitable thing to speak of Christ and the graces of His Spirit only as having heard of them or read of them, *as men that travel in their studies do of foreign countries.*"

3. If for nothing else, Leighton richly repays study for his stimulating power in cultivating a true thoughtfulness on spiritual things. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with his quick insight into authors, discerned this power in Leighton. Hence his use of aphorisms taken from this divine in his "Aids to Reflection," a book which has powerfully moulded such minds as those of President James Marsh and Dr. William G. T. Shedd. One cannot read long in any of Leighton's writings without coming upon some statement of a truth which will impel him to think; never because it is paradoxical nor strained, but because it is—what Coleridge called it—aphoristic. A specimen of this is found in the opening sentences of the lecture on Romans xii. 3-12: "*He that gives rules of life without first fixing principles of faith offers preposterously at building a house without laying a foundation; and he that instructs what to believe, and directs not withal a believer how to live, doth in vain lay a foundation without following out the building.*" This will bear a good deal of thinking on. It contains in short compass a whole philosophy of religious training. One word of caution as to the handling of such an author. Cursory reading will not do. If he be not studied somewhat carefully his excellences will not be recognized. As in some of the masterpieces of art, glances will not reveal their beauties, only a steady gaze. So with Leighton. But they who do study him rejoice over hid treasure.