

LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE REV. HENRY GRATTAN GUINNESS.

MEN who can speak freely in the language of common life, says the Editor of the *Christian World*, will rarely, if ever, fail to catch the ear of the multitude—no matter what may be the topics on which they discourse. This fact is so palpable, and the cause of it so obvious, that nobody who reflects upon the subject for a moment can help wondering that ministers of religion should have so uniformly used scholastic or technical phraseology when preaching the gospel. But sermons of this nature will never greatly attract and influence the uneducated—and these have ever been, and are still, the great majority of the nation. The truth is, the language of the schools and the language of the people are quite different dialects; and hence ministerial training produces the very opposite effect from that for which it is designed.

But it may be asked, perhaps, why is this? Is knowledge, in itself, or in its acquisition, an evil? Not at all. It is the “*little learning*,” which is here a “*dangerous thing*.” The young minister acquires learning, but stops short before he learns how to use it; or, rather, while acquiring knowledge, he, in some sense, unlearns his native tongue, and acquires a mode of speech which is comparatively without signification in the ears of the people.

This may be illustrated by comparing the success of what are called well-trained and efficient ministers, with that of some who have entered the field without scholastic training. Take the cases of Haldane and Aikman, who, without a theological education, extended their power and success over the whole of Scotland, and called into being a hundred churches, which now constitute a thriving body. The power of these mighty men lay mainly, under God, in speaking to the people in their own tongue in which they were born. Because they did simply this, their preaching was everywhere attended with eager and listening throngs. Equally pertinent is the case of Howell Harris, in Wales, who gathered the body of what are called Calvinistic Methodists there. The one secret of his greatness and success, was his access to the hearts of the people through the simple language of the people. That he had more of piety, or more of eloquence, in the common acceptance of that term, than many a minister whose influence has been confined within the bounds of his single parish, does not appear.

The whole history of Methodism is a living illustration of the same thing. It swept the people like a rushing mighty wind, when it first came up in England, because it put off the scholastic costume, and approached them in their own familiar dress. Whitfield, Wesley, and Rowland Hill had indeed been trained in the schools. Afterwards, however, to some extent, they learned the common use of the English language; but what was more, they caused their own thoughts and views to find utterance by thousands of tongues that had never learned the dialect of the schools. Their power was that of countless lay preachers, who animated by their spirit, went forth, as in primitive times, “the Lord working with them confirming the word by signs following.”

The true source of the great power of Methodism, when it first came in,

undoubtedly, was the employment of uneducated men, who could preach in no other than the language of the people. By this means she spoke directly to the understanding, and the hearts of her hearers. By this means she awoke around herself a sympathy in the popular mind, and reached stratum which could be reached only in a very imperfect degree by a learned ministry. To those who had themselves been well instructed, and were capable of appreciating truth when put forth in logical forms, and according to the educated modes of thought, the rude speech of many of the lay exhorters was distasteful and repellent. The itinerant preachers, therefore, went into the outskirts of the towns and parishes, and drew in many of those who had fallen off from the established congregations. In this way, so far as they taught the truth, they did a good work. And in proportion as they taught the truth, as it is in Jesus, they were instrumental in doing incalculable good. But our concern now is with this popular feature of their work, which shows where their strength lay; and what, in a qualified sense, will be needful for us, if we would seize and hold that order of mind among the masses which we have too much failed to reach.

This view is confirmed, in another way, by the more recent experience of Methodism. About in the same proportion as it has been taking to itself an educated ministry of late, it has been losing its hold upon the popular interest. True, other causes have conspired with this. But this, viewed in connexion with the fact that the results of the system, as exhibited in experience, have worked against it, must be taken as the main cause of its decline.

If we need further illustration of the power accruing to the preacher from the use of the language of the people, we find it in the instance of Luther—whose case, by the way, shows it not to be impossible to combine the power of learning and culture with high perfection in the language of the masses. In nothing was Luther more wonderfully fitted to be the great Reformer that he was, than in his rare combination of acquired and native talents. He was one of the strong men among the learned, and especially mighty in the Scriptures, and, at the same time, while speaking to the people, he was eminently one of them. In reading his writings, we have often paused to admire the simplicity, transparency, and force of his thought and diction. His conceptions take such simple forms, and come forth in such common and easy words that the humblest mind takes the full impression of it at a glance. Thus none of his strength is wasted in the air, but the concentrated energy of his soul grasps the hearer's mind, and carries it on irresistibly to his conclusion. If you inquire what one quality of Luther's mind, more than any other, made him the Samson who had strength to grasp the pillars of the idol temple and carry them away, we answer it was his power of throwing the natural and acquired energies of his soul into the living language of the people.

Bunyan is another eminent example of the same point. His training was not at all in the schools. And yet John Owen, the prince of the Puritan theologians, has said of him, "Give me the Tinker's power to preach, and you shall have all my learning." Bunyan's "Pilgrim" has travelled far over the earth, and spoken to men of all climes, and has everywhere carried a resistless charm to the popular mind; and, through that immortal work, Bunyan continues to preach the gospel, with a voice unbroken by age. If, now, you undertake to scan the elements of his power you will find none more prominent among them than his use of the idiom of the masses of the people. His whole habit of thought and speech was formed among them, and though gifted by nature with the higher attributes of genius, and by grace with a soul inflamed with the love of Christ, and with a deep and broad experience of the conflicts between nature and grace in the heart, all the issues of his mind went out through channels of communication with fellow-minds that had been formed in converse with the masses. His calling, as a traveller tinker, had brought him into connexion with all sorts of people. His mind, so to speak, had fused itself with theirs; and their speech had become his own, so that when he came to speak to them of Christ and redemption, he was prepared to speak in thoughts and words which could not fail to penetrate their minds.

The fact is equally palpable in the present day, and among ourselves; and we have a delightful illustration of it in the person and ministry of the Rev. Henry Grattan Guinness.

The commercial axiom, that demand creates supply, is true to a large extent, in reference to sacred as well as secular things. In religious matters, however, we see not only the beautiful operation of natural laws, but also the evident workings of Divine Providence. The history of the church in all ages testifies to the encouraging fact, that men have been raised up, and exactly fitted for the performance of the precise work which the times they lived in required to be done. It has frequently happened, moreover, that the instruments provided have been of a description in no way calculated, in the estimation of men, to work out the desired end. Indeed, it is never by human wisdom that great spiritual objects are accomplished.

It is the conviction of many, that the Rev. H. G. Guinness is raised up to do a large portion of the evangelistic work which it is, on all hands, admitted will have to be done before the masses of the people shall come to know, even theoretically, the essential principles of the Gospel, much less be brought under their elevating and saving power; and the peculiar circumstances, which partake largely of the nature of the providential, which have attended his early career, may well lead to the conviction, that he is following in the path marked out for his steps by the allwise Disposer of events. Mr. Guinness has of late been drawing immense congregations, at Whitfield's Tabernacle, Moorfields, on Sabbath-days, both morning and evening, and wherever else he appears on the week-day evenings.

He was born in August, 1836, at Montpelier House, near Kingstown, about six miles from Dublin. His father was brother to Mr. Guinness, the brewer, of Dublin stout celebrity, and was an officer in the army; and his mother, the widow of Captain D'Esterre, who fell in a duel with the late Daniel O'Connell, some thirty-five years ago. He was brought up, and well instructed by his pious parents in the knowledge of Divine truth. He was educated at Cheltenham, and afterwards at Exeter, under the Rev. Dr. Mills and the Rev. C. Worthy; both of these gentlemen entertained the highest esteem and regard for him. In his boyhood, he was the subject of strong convictions; but about four years ago, he determined to go to sea, having become careless and indifferent about the one thing needful. He left this land, and wandered over the shores of Mexico, the West Indies, Texas, through the Caribbean Seas, &c., and having been absent for some time, he at length returned home. During the voyage, the ship was nearly being lost on two occasions, and it was chiefly owing (the captain states) to the steadiness and great presence of mind displayed by young Guinness, that the ship was preserved. About the years 1854-55, he again set out on a voyage to the East Indies. Soon after the ship sailed, they were obliged to put back, in a half-wrecked condition, and he, being attacked by a most serious and alarming illness, was quite unable to proceed on this voyage; and returned to his home at Cheltenham, apparently in a dying state.

It was about this time that it pleased the Lord to open his eyes, and that he was brought to feel his backsliding state; and being fully convinced of what he was, and how he had grieved the Holy Spirit, and having obtained peace in believing, he, at once, with the help of the Divine Spirit, determined to spend and be spent in his Master's service, and for this purpose he entered New College, London, under his kind friend and tutor, the late Dr. Harris—this was about January, 1856. He also induced his brother, Mr. Wyndham Guinness, to leave the sea, and to enter New College, where he now is, studying with a view to the Christian ministry; and by his advice, his younger brother also, Mr. Frederick Guinness, entered Lady Huntingdon College, at Cheshunt. Truly, their mother is blessed in having three such sons devoted to the service of the Redeemer!

Concerning any man or work, receiving much public attention, there will, of course, be formed many and very diverse opinions. Mr. Guinness proves no exception to the rule. He was first heard of in London in the beginning of last

year, as a "laborious, pious, earnest, and pathetic preacher," and possessed of "more than ordinary talent," at which time he commenced preaching in the open air, in London. At times thousands were attracted; and he has been obliged to have policemen to protect him, he has been so insulted and molested by Roman Catholics. Nothing daunted, he persevered, preaching for months, and distributing afterwards thousands of Drummond's tracts; and we sincerely trust that much good was done. About August, he visited Cheltenham, and preached almost every evening in the Promenade to thousands—people of all ranks listening most attentively. He also was invited to preach in the Town Hall; and great numbers appeared to have been brought to a state of conviction, and his house was literally besieged by old and young anxious inquirers. There have been, at times, fifty in a day at his house.

Afterwards he proceeded to Birmingham, where he preached to thousands, both in the open air and in chapels, and here numbers appeared to have been in a most anxious state about their souls. He remained in this place about three weeks, and then proceeded to Wednesbury, and daily, for about a fortnight, assisted by his brother, he descended the shaft of the mines, to a depth of 600 feet, and preached the gospel to these poor benighted men. In October, 1856, he visited Exeter; where he preached every night, except Saturdays, for nearly three weeks, to the most crowded congregations—hundreds being obliged to go away, unable to gain admission. Numbers in the city of Exeter are said to have been brought to a knowledge of Jesus, during this visit, and bless the day that he went amongst them. He then visited Cornwall; and in all the towns he preached in, thousands were collected to hear him. Since then, he has visited many other counties in England; and we understand it is his intention to visit Wales, Scotland, and also his native land, Ireland, this summer, and at no distant period, if spared, to visit America and Australia. On these, as well as on other accounts, it has been suggested that a Wesley and a Whitfield were about to have their parallels in a Spurgeon and a Guinness.

Having, as we have said, gained extensive notice, and preached to immense gatherings of the people in the south-western part of England, Mr. Guinness came to London, to resume his studies at New College, and preached several special revival sermons at the Independent Chapel, Fetter Lane. The place was crowded with people, and the general impression produced, we are assured, was deep and good. It was observed that the Rev. Dr. Campbell was present at one of these services, and this circumstance led to the youthful evangelist being invited to occupy the pulpit of the Tabernacle, of which, as doubtless most of our readers are aware, Dr. Campbell, editor of the *British Standard* and *Christian Witness*, is the pastor. If this be so—and it is certain that Mr. Guinness has now, for many weeks, actually preached at the Tabernacle, whatever may have been the originating cause—then we may infer that Dr. Campbell, who is no mean judge of ministerial, as well as general ability and worth, believed that he discerned qualities in Mr. Guinness calculated for popular usefulness.

But Mr. Guinness had not preached half-a-dozen times in the metropolis, before adverse criticisms were expressed. One gentleman, after hearing him at Commercial Road Chapel, says: "I was much disappointed. There was something singularly eccentric in the preacher's manner, from the beginning to the end of the service; such as keeping his seat for several minutes after the singing was ended, previous to reading the lesson, and the giving out of his text; and pausing in his discourse, at times not a little astonishing to his congregation, who might have come to the conclusion that he had lost himself. Altogether, it was anything but a sermon that I expected to hear from a man, of whom so much had been said." Another friendly critic animadverts upon the "long pauses," and "cannot divine the motive" for them. We, however, are glad to know that this habit, which had anything but a pleasing effect upon the audience, is less frequently witnessed.

We ourselves have, says the aforesaid writer, in the *Christian World*, made two Sunday-evening visits to the Tabernacle. On both occasions, that immense place

of worship—the largest but one, we believe, in the metropolis—was crowded to excess; and from what we could judge, no inconsiderable portion of the people were unaccustomed to public worship, but were drawn out by the fame of the preacher.

The moment you observe him you can hardly fail to be struck with his appearance. It is decidedly singular, and rather prepossessing. In person he is tall and slender, and of an easy graceful manner. The long, thin face, not altogether destitute of a healthful hue, but sometimes tinged with a hectic flush, bears, in repose, a grave and studious aspect; and when lighted up, as it frequently is, with a quiet smile of pleasure, indicates the presence of a genial and sympathetic spirit. The long, dark hair, parted in the centre and thrown backwards, gives to the preacher a rather womanish aspect. But his voice is by no means feminine, for it is full and loud. Indeed we do not suppose that there is a church, chapel, or hall in London, or elsewhere, in which he could not make himself heard to the remotest corner; albeit he is sometimes so rapid in his utterance, that the words unite and become indistinct. Mr. Guinness does not, like Mr. Spurgeon, repudiate the gown and bands, but wears both, at least at the Tabernacle, at which some have expressed surprise, seeing that he has not yet received ordination, and is still a student. But Mr. Guinness, in other matters as well as this, does not ask, "What will the world say?" and study the fashion; but wisely acts a free and independent part. That which strikes you most, perhaps, in his preaching, is the thoroughly natural and unstudied style of address he employs; and, it is to this fact, we believe, may be attributed much of his power over the people, who, despite the frequent want of logic that is displayed, and the lack of connexion that is observable to the critical eye, between the different parts of a single discourse, rarely fails to move and melt his hearers. To characterize the style of Mr. Guinness in a sentence, we should say it is pictorial preaching; comparisons, contrasts, figures, and anecdotes making up the staple of both the sermons that we have heard. But whoever may feel disappointed with the matter of the preacher, and regret that the framework of his discourses is not of a more solid description, and able to bear with greater ease the mass of ornament employed, few will question his intense earnestness, and fail to conclude from his impassioned manner that the conversion of souls to Christ is the master purpose of his life, and the one object that he has always in view. This fact, with devout men, anxious for the diffusion of the gospel among the teeming millions of our great towns and cities, will be sure to go far to disarm criticism, and to call forth gratitude to God for raising up another herald of salvation, with such peculiarities and powers as to be able to gain the ear of those whom the most logical and polished orators fail to reach; and not reaching, cannot by possibility benefit.

So favourable is the impression which Mr. Guinness has produced upon the pastor and the church, at the Tabernacle, that a pressing invitation has been given him to become the permanent occupant of the pulpit of Whitfield; but which, we understand, he has felt to be his duty to decline, preferring, for the present, an itinerant ministry, to the discharge of ordinary pastoral duties.