



REV. WILLIAM L. LEDWITH, D. D.

JOURNAL

OF THE

Presbyterian Historical Society

VOL. II.

DECEMBER, 1904.

No. 7.

WILLIAM LAURENCE LEDWITH:

1850-1904.

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About thirty miles south of Pittsburg, where the Monongahela River makes a graceful curve, Brownsville rests on the sloping side of one of Fayette County's picturesque hills. It is one of Pennsylvania's most attractive towns, and is not without historic associations, as it is on one of the old highways, and its inn was a favorite stopping place of Henry Clay and his friends during their political campaigns.

Here, on March 14th, 1850, William Laurence Ledwith was born to William Medkirk and Jane Bryce Ledwith, and was baptized by the Rev. Thomas Martin in the summer of 1850. His father was born and raised in Washington, Washington County, Pa., and his mother was born in Paisley, Scotland, coming to this country while quite young.

In a letter to the writer of this sketch, the Rev. Hughes O. Gibbons, D. D., of Philadelphia, contributes the following interesting reminiscences of Dr. Ledwith's boyhood:

"My first recollection of William L. Ledwith goes back to 1858. I first saw him one Sabbath as he entered the Presbyterian Church of Brownsville, Pa., with his father and mother. Among the boys of the congregation he attracted my attention especially, because of his remarkably erect and especially neat appearance. He had a pale, intellectual face, and, as I found afterwards, was wonderfully alert.

While he enjoyed the boys' sports of the day I think even as early as that he found his chief interest in books and study. Will Ledwith was known as a boy of exceptional purity. He was born with high moral tendencies, ever regarding with horror anything like profanity or vulgarity. All coarse and cruel things seemed to pain and distress him. I never understood that he was an exceptionally hard student as a boy, but his mind seemed to be occupied constantly with things that were intellectual and beautiful. I think he had naturally a high poetic gift, and it has always seemed strange to me that he had never written poetry as a youth. He may have done so, however, without it being generally known, for in his boyhood I never knew of his boasting of what he had done, or was able to do, or expected to do. He was essentially modest.

"I never knew of his forming any very intimate friendships in early life. I think there was in his nature an element of intellectual and social timidity, which was, perhaps, due to a certain precocity of character. Mr. Ledwith's father and mother were excellent people. His father, William Ledwith, and the father of Senator Philander Knox, were the officers in the old Brownsville Bank, which was one of the few financial institutions that did not suspend specie payment during the war. They were close friends, and seemed to be in personal character very much like the bank. I remember hearing my father say that the Bank of Brownsville would always be perfectly safe so long as Mr. Knox and Mr. Ledwith handled its cash and books. The Ledwith family was an example of true Christian simple living. They anticipated 'the simple life,' of which we are hearing a great deal at this time. I do not think there were many homes in that Christian community sweeter or more wholesome than that in which Mr. Ledwith grew up."

As the natural result of the faithful and gentle Christian nurture which he had received from godly parents, at the age of fifteen, on October 29th, 1865, William L. Ledwith made a public confession of his faith in Christ by uniting with the Brownsville Presbyterian Church, whose pastor at that time was the Rev. J. H. Stevenson.

From early childhood he displayed a love for books and scholarly pursuits, and never thought seriously of devoting his life to any other calling than that of the Ministry of the Gospel. Those who knew him in childhood tell of how he delighted in playing church, when he used a high chair for a pulpit and his sister and brothers gathered around him as congregation. In securing his education he went first to the public school in Brownsville, and later to the Academy at Tuscarora, Pa., and the West Virginia University at Morgantown, on the Monon-

gahela River. His address on graduating from the latter institution was spoken of by the Morgantown newspapers as showing wonderful thoughtfulness and a charming diction for so young a man. During his special preparation for college his pastor was the Rev. W. W. McLane, D. D., who is now the pastor of a Congregational church in New Haven, Conn. Dr. McLane, a scholarly and spiritually minded man, did much by his preaching, teaching, and personal influence, to give direction to the tastes and later life of Mr. Ledwith.

In 1870 he entered Princeton College with the Class of 1874, during the presidency of Dr. James McCosh. Having been graduated with honors from the college, he, in the fall of 1874, entered the Princeton Theological Seminary, from which he was graduated in the Class of 1877. The seven years which he spent in Princeton were doubtless, in many ways, the happiest of his life. In college he gave special attention to and took particular delight in the study of rhetoric, oratory, and literature; and in the Seminary next to his devotion to the study of the English Bible was his love of the study of homiletics. He sat at the feet of his teachers with ardent devotion to them and appreciation of their labors, and their influence on him was most marked. Among the members of the Princeton Faculty, those who seem to have made the greatest impression on him were President James McCosh and Professors Arnold Guyot, John T. Duffield, and Lyman H. Atwater, of the College; and Dr. Charles Hodge and Professor William Henry Green, of the Theological Seminary.

In Princeton Mr. Ledwith never made an enemy, but drew to himself many devoted friends. His favorite exercise was walking, and he appeared at his happiest when, arm in arm with some congenial friend, he was traversing the roads or roaming the fields around Princeton and discussing some favorite poet or prose writer, most probably his favorite poet, Wordsworth, who was in many ways his ideal and with whose poetry he kept himself saturated. He gave much attention to the work in Whig Hall, the literary society of which he was an honored member, and did some superior work for the *Nassau Literary Magazine*.

He was licensed to preach by Redstone Presbytery (Presby. Church in U. S. A.) April 26th, 1876. During his first Seminary vacation Mr. Ledwith supplied the Presbyterian Church at Greensborough, Pa.; and during his second vacation he supplied the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church at Central City, Colorado. In both these fields he gave eminent satisfaction, doing in each successful work for Christ. Central City, at the head of Virginia Cañon, in Colorado, was and is a typical mining town, and some of Mr. Ledwith's friends had slight misgivings as to how he would get along with the rough-and-tumble miners. But he won all hearts by his cheerful and sympathetic pastoral work, and commanded the respect of the whole community by his excellent executive ability and his scholarly and spiritual preaching of the Gospel. The people of Central City let him return to the East most reluctantly, and many of them not without tears at parting with their young but able and beloved minister.

After faithful and effective work in Princeton Theological Seminary, where he drew all hearts to him by his rare combination of gentleness and strength, he accepted a call to the Bellevue Presbyterian Church at Gap, Lancaster County, Pa., where he was ordained to the ministry by the Presbytery of Westminster, June 27th, 1877, and installed as pastor of the Bellevue Church. It had been a dream of Mr. Ledwith's during his Seminary days to have a country parish, and he found in the beauties of nature with which he was now surrounded, and in the warm hearts and helping hands of the Bellevue people his dream more than fulfilled. Those were six happy years of toil, study, and growth which he spent among the hills and valleys of Lancaster County.

But God had a work for him to do in a very different field in the heart of one of our great and growing cities. In 1883 he received a call from the South Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and felt that it was his duty to accept it. Reluctantly leaving his loyal and loving Bellevue flock, he went to the city and was installed as pastor on November 22d, 1883. For nine years he wrought for the Master in this important down-town parish, and was a worthy follower of his gifted predecessor,

Robert M. Patterson, D. D. It was during this pastorate that, in 1886, he married Miss Sarah W. Cooper, a daughter of Elder Joseph P. Cooper, a Philadelphia dry-goods merchant, and two children, Jean and Laurence, crowned his married life.

Early in 1892 Mr. Ledwith received a unanimous call to the Tioga Presbyterian Church, which is situated at Tioga and Sixteenth Streets, in a growing part of Philadelphia. On his accepting that call his pastoral relation with the South Church was dissolved March 7th, 1892. He was installed as pastor of Tioga Church on April 5th, 1892, and entered on a pastorate which was ideal in every respect, and was terminated only with his death. During his nearly twelve years with the Tioga Church it grew steadily, the work among the young people especially increasing to such an extent that a larger chapel had to be erected. It is a beautiful and commodious structure and a splendid addition to the working power of the church.

Three journeys across the Atlantic, the first in 1880, the second in 1883 and the third in 1895, not only were thoroughly enjoyed by the hard-working pastor, but also contributed largely to that refinement and culture of thought, expression and manner which constituted so large an element of the attractiveness which drew all kinds of people to him.

In addition to his work in his own parish, Mr. Ledwith was in great demand for work in the various judicatories of the Church. Besides effective labors on various committees, he was once the Moderator of the Westminster Presbytery and twice the Moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. In 1883 he was sent as a Commissioner to the General Assembly which met at Saratoga Springs, N. Y., and was sent to the same city as a Commissioner to two other General Assemblies, those which were held in 1890 and in 1896. In the Church courts his work was valuable, because he was thoughtful, careful, conscientious and conservative.

In 1890-91 Mr. Ledwith became a member of the Presbyterian Historical Society and a member of its Executive Council. On the resignation of the Librarian, the Rev. D. K. Turner, in 1893, he was unanimously elected to serve during the unexpired term. Thereafter he was re-elected Librarian at each an-

nual meeting until his death. He found this work arduous but most congenial, and rendered invaluable service by setting all things in order according to the latest library methods, and, in 1898, superintended the removal of the library from its old quarters to its commodious and convenient new home in the Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia.¹

He received the degree of A. M. in 1877 and the degree of D. D. in 1895, both from his Alma Mater, Princeton University. These honors he deserved and wore with grace and dignity. As a member of the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-school Work, a Director of the Ministers' Fund, Philadelphia, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Princeton Seminary Alumni Association, Dr. Ledwith did efficient work, in addition to his regular labors as a preacher and pastor, with which he allowed nothing else to interfere.

During the last ten years of his life he made frequent contributions to the religious press, especially to *The Presbyterian* and *The Presbyterian Review*, writing on themes especially related to the preacher and his art.

In personal appearance Dr. Ledwith was tall, slender, and delicate looking, with a countenance that bespoke refinement, culture, and spirituality. In every way, however, he was stronger than a superficial observer would imagine, for he accomplished daily a great amount of work, and was most decided and unyielding in his convictions, which he proclaimed with no uncertain sound. He was pre-eminently a student, preparing his sermons with the utmost care and devoting great attention to their literary finish. But he never allowed his studious tastes and habits to interfere with his duties as a pastor, duties which were a delight to him and which he discharged with great tenderness and faithfulness. It is believed, indeed, that his faithfulness in visiting his flock while in a depressed physical condition may have hastened the end. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Dr. Ledwith preached in his Tioga pulpit Sunday, February 21st, 1904. The next day he felt unwell, but did not

¹ See minute of the Executive Council in the JOURNAL, Vol. II, p. 275. In that minute the spelling of the middle name should be *Laurence*.—Ed.

appear to be seriously ill. Influenza followed, which rapidly brought on pneumonia, and the end came quickly but quietly on Sunday, February 28th, 1904,—the first day of the week, the day on which his Lord arose from the dead and brought life and immortality to light.

Thoroughly evangelical in his belief and preaching, untiring in his pastoral labors, manly yet most courteous in all his relations to those outside the Church, he won the respect and affection not only of all who knew him in his own great city, but also of very many throughout the Church and country. The world is the poorer for his departure, and yet it is richer; for his death has directed attention to a rarely beautiful and holy life and character. "He being dead yet speaketh," and he appeals to us with the peculiar power of one exalted to the heavenly heights, bidding us who still linger and labor to be faithful until death and we shall receive the crown of life.

"For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be for ever blest."