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JULY, 1920

THOMAS GUTHRIE

Wandering one day down Princes Street in Edinburgh, somewhere between the Scott monument and the National Gallery, and not far from the memorial to Scottish soldiers who fell in the Boer War, I came upon a bronze group of three figures. In the center stood a tall man, massive head and benign countenance. On either side of him, as if taking refuge from a pursuer who would do them harm, crouches a ragged street urchin. In striking contrast with the many memorials on that famous street to Scotland's heroes on the crimson field of war, her philosophers, scientists and poets, this fine statue commemorates the life and ministry of a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Thomas Guthrie. In the burying ground at the other end of the street there is a statue of Abraham Lincoln erected by Scottish Americans who fought in the Civil War. At the feet of Lincoln cowers a slave; but his fetters have been struck from him, and Lincoln reaches down his great hand to lift the negro to his feet. Both monuments, that to Thomas Guthrie, with the ragged boys about him, and that to Lincoln with the negro at his feet, suggest the greatness that is also goodness. Perhaps the monument to Guthrie makes the deeper appeal; there is less of the formal and grandiose in art about it, and, although it does not always use him well, all the world loves a boy. A fitting memorial, one would say—and not far from the model of the Gospels, where we see little children gathered about the feet of Jesus—for this minister of Christ to have the street Arabs associated with him in the sculptor's creation.

I commence with this account of the Princes Street memorial to Guthrie for the reason that that monument to

Guthrie, his back to those ill-smelling alleys and ugly closes of the 'old town,' bad enough, God knows, even to-day, but fearful in their misery and depravity then, and through which he wandered in search of the vagabond boys, is the best introductory comment upon the homiletic power of the great preacher. To an extraordinary degree for a Scottish preacher, Guthrie was without that taste for metaphysics which characterizes so many of his countrymen. But always it is a great heart that beats in his sermons and a heart that could warm other hearts.

Like Chalmers, Guthrie was the son of a village merchant. He was born at Brechin, Forfarshire, on July 12th, 1803, the youngest but one of thirteen children. His grandfather on his father's side he remembered for the reverent manner in which he approached God in asking the blessing at meals. "When all had taken their seats, and were waiting in solemn silence, he slowly uncovered his hoary locks of the cap he wore in the house; and, slightly throwing back his head, with his open eyes raised to heaven, he implored a blessing on the meal—his voice and uplifted eyes tremulous with age, and his countenance wearing an expression of profound devotion." His bringing up was of the kind which obtained in all well ordered and pious Scotch homes. No luxuries, hard work and study, and a Sabbath of solemnities. There were many fast days too; but to show the difference between a Sabbath and a fast day Guthrie tells us that he and his brothers on the fast day would give vent to one short whistle. His first pedagogue was Jamie Stewart, a weaver by trade. Though but a thoughtless boy Guthrie was struck with the prayers which this old man offered at the meetings of the congregation. "With a remarkable knowledge of his Bible, and perfect mastery of its language, he so interwove its sublimest passages into his prayers that they seemed like the utterance of a seraph before the throne." His first text book was the Book of Proverbs. Confessing to the part this book played in his early education he writes, "The patience, prudence, foresight and economy which used to

characterize Scotchmen—giving occasion to the saying, ‘a canny Scott’—and by which they were so often able to rise in the world and distance all competitors in the race of life, was to a large extent due to their being thus engrained in youth and childhood with the practical wisdom enshrined in the Book of Proverbs.”

The stir of mighty events on the stage of the world’s politics found their echo in the Scottish town. On one occasion, at a watering place on the Fife coast, there were alarms of the French fleet being off the coast. When they rushed to the shore they saw many hundreds of vessels, all under spread of canvas and convoyed by grim men of war. It was not the French fleet, but the West India fleet making under convoy for the Atlantic, north by the Pentland Firth. When the news of Waterloo reached the village every window had its candle illumination.

In 1815, when but a lad of twelve, Guthrie was sent off to Edinburgh to enter the University. He made no great mark as a scholar. “Beyond the departments of fun and fighting, I was no way distinguished at college.” In after years he was thankful that he had gained no decorations or prizes, for the absence of them saved him from any conceit on the ground of scholarship. After four years in the college he commenced at the age of sixteen the four years’ course in theology. When this term was finished he was two years under the age for taking the trials as a preacher. These two years he employed in further study at the University, electing mostly the subjects of natural science. “I lost the metaphysics, but gained the physics, and perhaps, so far as common sense, power of conversation, knowledge of the world, and power of popular address on the platform and in the pulpit, were concerned, that was a good bargain.”

He was licensed by the Presbytery of Brechin in 1825; but no patron of a congregation offering him a congregation, and weary of hanging about home, he set out for Paris. There he spent a year taking lectures at the Sorbonne under

eminent scientists and making the round of the French hospitals. In his journal for that year is the following reference to Charles Hodge: "I then set off for Mark Wilks' service, which is held in a part of the Oratoire. The preacher was a Mr. Hodge, an American professor, who had come to Europe for the purpose of studying the Oriental languages. He intended to do so in Germany, but was at present studying French in Paris, as a medium of communication with the Germans. He was a young-like, intelligent, fair, good-looking, thin, and rather little man; and gave us a capital sermon from the 19th verse of the fifth chapter of I John. The singing was very beautiful. The English sounded most sweetly and pleasantly to my ear." Upon returning to Brechin in 1827, he succeeded one of his brothers as manager of the Bank, making a very successful administrator of its affairs. It was not until 1830 that he was named for the parish of Arbilot. It had been a long apprenticeship that he had served, but the training in science and in business was undoubtedly of great influence upon his mind and helps us to understand his fondness for dealing with facts, objects, the external side of life, and his distaste for metaphysics, and comparative inability to touch the hidden springs of thought.

Arbilot was a parish of a thousand souls on the German Ocean. The manse and the church were in sad disrepair, the snow frequently lying on the rafters of the church when he was preaching, and nothing but an earth floor beneath their feet. The manse was repaired, a new church built, a library and a savings bank started. He made it plain from the beginning that he had come not to seek the honor of this people but to serve them. One of the old wives of the parish, hearing a talk of the new minister's popularity, said, "You are a' speakin' of the fine young man you have just gotten for a minister: but if he is faithful to His Master, be sure he'll have a' the blackguards of the parish on his tap in three weeks!" It was a prophecy which was fulfilled. The members of the parish were intelligent and self-respect-

ing and religious. "There was one Dissenter, a very worthy man, a tailor, who travelled every Sunday, fair weather and foul, ten or twelve miles in order that he might worship with his own sect of Old Light Seceders in Arbroath; there was one man who could not read, but he was an interloper, and not a native; and there was one who did not attend church on the Lord's Day, and he was crazy. The first was much respected; the second was regarded as a curiosity, people pointing him out as the man who could not read; and the third nobody heeded, far less followed his example. On the other hand we had two or three as bad, immoral fellows as were to be found in the whole counrty, yet they were never out of church."

A witness at trials and autopsies, a nurse during epidemics, the lender of books and the keeper of the savings bank, the minister of Arbilot was the friend and the guide of his people, entering into the life of the community in a way which to-day is, unhappily, impossible. For his library he brought from Edinburgh the two volumes of the sermons of Chalmers, and loaned them to his weaver friend, David Gibson. He was astonished when David declined to take the second volume away with him, saying, "Minister, I have no time for him!" "Time!" Guthrie replied, "David, what do you mean?" "You see, sir," answered David, "I got on so slowly; I had to sit with the book in the tae hand and the Dictionar' in the ither; and the warst of it was, I could na find his lang-nebbed words in the Dictionar'!"

In 1830, after his seven years of useful labor at Arbilot, the Town Council of Edinburgh elected him one of the ministers of Old Greyfriars Church. When Guthrie heard that the deputation from the Council was coming down to hear him he tried to cheat them by getting McCosh, afterwards President of Princeton College, and then his nearest neighbor at Arbroath to exchange pulpits with him. McCosh refused to aid him, telling him that leaving Arbilot on that Sabbath to escape the call to Edinburgh would be as bad as Jonah's flight, when ordered to go and preach in Nineveh.

It was a great arena to which Guthrie had come. In a way that was true in no other country, the greatness that was Scotland clustered about the foot of the crag upon which stands the grim old Castle. The chief figure in the Church of Scotland, Dr. Chalmers, was professor of Divinity at the University whither he had come from St. Andrews. Dr. Candlish was at St. George's, and Dr. Cunningham at Trinity. Into this camp of the mighty came the tall, broad shouldered youth of twenty seven years. His own church was one of the historic shrines of Edinburgh and all Scotland, for it was there that, on a Sunday in February, 1638, just two centuries before Guthrie came up from Arbilot to become the minister, the National Covenant was read aloud to the multitude in the Church and in the churchyard. When the reading was finished the Covenant was laid upon the top of one of the flat tombs and the people crowded to sign it, not a few in their enthusiasm opening their veins that they might sign it in their own blood. On the Martyr's Monument in Greyfriars there are only three names of the 18,000 who perished in the days of the Covenant—Argyll's, Renwick's, and James Guthrie's. This James Guthrie was one of the ancestors of the Thomas Guthrie who now came to be minister of the historic church. If great association and the background of history mean anything to a preacher, then Guthrie was peculiarly blessed of fortune in being made the minister of a church whose very stones were redolent of great religious convictions and enthusiasms.

For the important trial that now confronted him Guthrie had for his strength a godly heritage, the faith that dwelt in his fathers, an honorable name, a more than usually long period of university training, residence and study abroad, a business experience, common sense, a knowledge of what is in man, ten years of fruitful ministry at Arbilot, and last, but not least, abounding health. "I have seen him," wrote Dr. McCosh, "in all sorts of situations, and I never saw his soul flat or depressed. In this respect I never knew any

one to be compared with him." That which is first in all notable human endeavor, the natural, was given unstintedly to this preacher. Guthrie was no brooder on the deeper side of life and is not the man to tell us of his own inmost thoughts. We learn little about his deeper religious experience, and judge that his religious life had been a gradual development, with no great crisis in it thrusting the eternities into the foreground. But while at Arbilot he had one serious illness when his life was despaired of and when he himself, expecting to die, exclaimed, "Oh, what would I do without my Saviour now!" This sickness did not leave him with a new theology, as was true in the case of Chalmers, for Guthrie's faith was from the beginning evangelical, but it enlarged his religious horizon and brought the deep note of the eternal into his preaching. It were good if every preacher could, in the first ten years of his ministry, be brought down where the cords of death compassed him and the pains of hell gat hold of him. No atmosphere-clearing experience like it, and no theological tutor to be compared with it!

When he accepted the call to Edinburgh Guthrie made with himself a quiet resolve that if he did not succeed in attracting and holding the people in the metropolis he would not be an incubus to the church there but would go out to America or some of the colonies. But he had not been long at Greyfriars before that resolve faded far into the background, for he at once commanded large congregations, and continued to do so for thirty-four years. There is probably not on record another instance of such a popularity continued without sign or token of diminution for the length of an entire generation. Chalmers was immensely popular, but his pastorates were brief, followed by periods of professorship in St. Andrews and Edinburgh. But for thirty-four years, until his resignation in 1864, Guthrie drew and held the crowds which thronged his churches, Greyfriars and St. John's.

In order to have any sympathetic understanding of the

homiletic spirit and method of Guthrie we must first know him as a pastor and a philanthropist. In a speech delivered in 1838 when he was pleading for the parochial system under the Established Church, Dr. Guthrie said, "I have read of a cave from which the most thoughtless came out sobered and the most talkative silent." To him his change from decent and self-respecting and self-supporting Arbilot to the dens and closes that environed Greyfriars in Edinburgh was like a visit to such a cave. He was appalled, sobered, pained at the degradation which he saw everywhere about him. He felt that he might as well have gone to be a missionary among the Hindoos on the banks of the Ganges. Some years before, Dr. Chalmers had embarked upon his enterprise of the evangelization of the masses, "excavating the heathen," as he calls it, by putting into operation his parochial system. The aim of this system was to reach and raise the submerged population of the great centers by building more churches and schools and by a thorough system of pastoral visitation and instruction. When he came to Edinburgh Guthrie determined to follow the same plan and make an heroic assault upon the vice and misery and destitution, physical and moral, which confronted him wherever he turned.

One of the best examples of his descriptive power is that passage in "Out of Harness" where he describes his meeting with Chalmers shortly after his coming to Edinburgh:

"It was there where one looks down on the street below, and on the foul, crowded closes that stretch like ribs down into the Cowgate, I stood on a gloomy day in the fall of the year '37. The streets were a puddle; the heavy air, loaded with smoke, was thick and murky; right below lay the narrow street of dingy tenements, whose toppling chimneys and patched and battered roofs were fit emblems of the fortunes of most of their tenants. Of these, some were lying over the sills of windows innocent of glass, or stuffed with old hats and dirty rags; others, coarse-looking women, with squalid children in their arms or at their feet, stood in groups at the close mouths—here with empty laughter, chaffing any passing acquaintance, there screaming with

each other in a drunken brawl, or standing sullen and silent, with hunger and ill usage in their saddened looks. A brewer's cart, threatening to crush beneath its ponderous wheels the ragged urchins who had no other playground, rumbled over the cause-way, drowning the quavering voice of one whose drooping head and scanty dress were in ill harmony with song, but not drowning the shrill pipe of an Irish girl, who thumped the back of an unlucky donkey, and cried her herrings at 'three a penny.' So looked the parish I had come to cultivate; and while contrasting the scene below with pleasant recollections of the parish I had just left—its singing larks, daisied pastures, decent peasants, and the grand blue sea rolling its lines of snowy breakers on the shore, my rather sad and sombre ruminations were suddenly checked. A hand was laid on my shoulder. I turned around to find Dr. Chalmers at my elbow. This good and great man knew that I had accepted an Edinburgh charge mainly for the purpose of trying what the parochial or territorial system, fairly wrought, could do towards Christianizing the heathendom beneath our feet, and restoring the denizens of the Cowgate and its closes to sober decent and church going habits. Contemplating the scene for a little in silence, all at once, with his broad Luther-like face glowing with enthusiasm, he waved his arm to exclaim, 'A beautiful field, sir; a very fine field of operation!'

Guthrie found his church filled with well dressed people who contrasted strangely with the population of his parish. His resolve was to come into close contact with the poor. In order to do this and to have more freedom in carrying out his plans Guthrie had built for him a new church, St. John's in the Nether-Bow, and to which he removed in 1840. The gallery of this church was let to applicants from all parts of the city; but six hundred and fifty sittings—the whole area of the church—were reserved as free seats for residents in the parish, poor or rich, who applied for them. He had fifteen deacons and thirty elders, each with his particular portion of the parish to look after the people, seeking out the non-churchgoers, of whom Edinburgh, not a large city, had more than fifty thousand, and bringing the children into the schools. Describing the work he was starting at St. John's Guthrie writes to a friend, "We are

abundantly filled with people, and you would be delighted to see the masses of common people who cram every corner and nook of the area." It was an inspiring example that the two most popular preachers of Great Britain set when both of them, Chalmers in Glasgow and Guthrie in Edinburgh, relinquished churches that had history and prestige and the patronage of the well-to-do, and went out to build churches for the common people, each determining in his heart that the prophetic and the New Testament apology for Christ's religion, that the *poor* have the gospel preached unto *them*, should again have a meaning in the church and with the people. The church to-day, as always, has many needs; but probably that is one of our greatest needs, the earnest and unquestioned desire and ambition on the part of our ministers to have the privilege of preaching the Gospel unto the poor. Unfortunately, not always through their own inclination, the tendency is for men of outstanding ability in the ministry to remove themselves from all contact with the poor.

In his unflagging efforts to 'throw a zone of mercy' around his miserable parish Guthrie was indefatigable in his work as a pastor. There is a story of an earlier minister in Edinburgh whose parish embraced a very degraded population. Once a year this minister approached the mouth of each 'close' in his district. Into their darkness and stench and squalor and immorality he never penetrated, but uncovering his head and lifting a gloved hand, he invoked the Divine blessing to rest on "all the inhabitants, young and old, of this close." This pious duty done he went his way and left the close to itself for another year. But Guthrie was not that kind of a pastor. Every day of the week, like Thomas Chalmers, he could be found exploring these darksome dens in which the people of his parish lived and sinned and suffered and died. As an instance of the minute care of his pastoral visitation the following jottings from his note-book will serve: "Taylor's land—Mother, 48—very delicate; sober; often not able to work, splitting wood. Anne

10, Mary 8, shake down; pawned gown to help rent; also shift, petticoat of mother's, two frocks of girls'; bonnet of her own; cut-down bedstead to sell; all to buy food." Often he said that he came home to his table at night so sickened by what he had seen that he could hardly partake of its plenty. This page torn from his pastoral notebook would not be remarkable if taken from the notebook of a parish worker or deaconess or city missionary; but it is remarkable, and to be considered by all who would be true ministers of Jesus Christ, because it is a page from the notebook of the most popular preacher of Scotland and of the whole world. To him humanity, however coarsened, sunken, debauched and enslaved, was ever the sacred thing, that for which all his work was done. He looked upon the multitude as sheep having no shepherd and was moved with compassion. It was that compassion which helped to make the great preacher. His sermons have an undertone of humanity's sorrows in them.

In these daily invasions of the haunts of sin and misery the thing that most touched Guthrie was the condition of the children. In 1841, on a visit to Anstruther, the birth-place of Chalmers, he saw a painting of a cobbler's shop. On his stool sat the cobbler, spectacles on his nose, an old shoe on his knees, massive forehead and firm mouth and eyes that beamed with benevolence. Around the cobbler, sitting or standing, was a group of children, all busy at their lessons. It was a representation of John Pounds, the Portsmouth cobbler who had taken pity on the "ragged children whom magistrates and ministers, ladies and gentlemen, were leaving to run wild, and go to ruin on their streets." Looking upon the picture Guthrie felt humiliated, ashamed of himself, and resolved to bestir himself to do more for little children. A second incident which turned his heart and mind in the direction of the destitute children was a midnight visit to the police station where he saw the homeless waifs seeking shelter for the night. On one open space before a stove, where the light shone full on his face, lay

a poor child who attracted his special attention. "He was miserably clad; he seemed about eight years old; he had the sweetest face I ever saw; his bed was the pavement, his pillow a brick, and as he lay calm in sleep, forgetful of all his sorrows, he might have served for a picture of injured innocence. He knew neither father nor mother, brothers nor friends; in the wide world his only friends were the police; how he lived they did not know; but there he was at night. I could not get that boy out of my mind or heart for days and nights together. I have often regretted that some effort was not made to save him. Before now, launched on the sea of passions and exposed to a thousand temptations, he has, too probably, become a melancholy wreck; left by a society, more criminal than he, to become a criminal, and then punished for his fate, not his fault."

Such were the scenes which touched the heart of Guthrie and made him resolve to do something for the saving of the children. Encouraged by the example of Sheriff Watson who in 1841 had started a Ragged School in Aberdeen, Guthrie published in 1847 his "Plea for Ragged Schools," hardly daring to think that his plea would meet with a favorable response. But it proved to be the word spoken in season. Almost every newspaper published extracts from the Plea, and in a few weeks he had secured contributions amounting to £700. Lord Jeffrey sent him a contribution of £50, and in his letter said, "I have long considered you and Dr. Chalmers as the two greatest benefactors of your age and country, and admired and envied you beyond all your contemporaries, though far less for your extraordinary genius and eloquence, than for the noble uses to which you have devoted these gifts, and the good you have done with the use of them. In all these respects, this last effort of yours is perhaps the most remarkable and important; and among the many thousand hearts that have swelled and melted over these wakening pages, I think I may say that none has been more deeply touched than my own." This letter to Guthrie reminds one of the noble letter Jeffrey

wrote to Dickens after he had sobbed and cried over No. 5 of *Dombey and Son*. It takes the pathos of childhood to open the door into the inmost of man's heart.

The object of these Ragged Schools was in brief as follows: To reclaim the neglected and profligate children of Edinburgh by giving them food for their daily support, instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic, industrial training, and last, but not least, by teaching them the truths of the Gospel. An association was formed, embracing all opinions and creeds and by the end of 1847 three schools had been opened, one for boys, another for girls, and a third for children of both sexes under ten years of age, with a total attendance of two hundred and sixty-five children. A dispute soon arose over the question of Roman Catholic children and the teaching of the Bible, a so-called "liberal" group maintaining that the teaching of the Bible should be dispensed with. But Guthrie insisted upon the Bible and the whole Bible. He protested that it was an abuse of words to consider the children he had gathered in these schools as either Roman Catholic or Protestant, declaring that they were outcasts, regardless of all religion—without even the profession of any. Dearly as he loved the Ragged Schools he said he would rather see them perish if they could be maintained only by parting with the Bible. The record of the city jails soon showed in eloquent and irrefutable evidence the effect of these schools upon the juvenile life of the city. In 1847 five percent of the prison population were under fourteen years of age. In 1851 the proportion had fallen to less than one percent. The connection of Dr. Guthrie with these Ragged Schools brought him into great prominence as a philanthropist and his counsel was often sought by statesmen, reformers, and legislators. No work was dearer to his heart than this enterprise he had started in behalf of the forsaken and abandoned children. "I have never engaged in a cause," he said at a conference in Birmingham, "as a man and a Christian minister that I believe on my death bed I will look back on with more

pleasure or gratitude to God, than that He led me to work for Ragged Schools. I have the satisfaction, when I lay my head upon my pillow, of always finding one soft part of it: and that is, that God has made me an instrument in His hand by saving many a poor creature from a life of misery and crime." The beautiful monument yonder on Princes Street, with the "city Arabs"—and it was Guthrie who brought that expression into our vocabulary—taking refuge under his arms, is the best possible memorial to the great preacher who saw the multitude of little children as sheep without a shepherd and was moved with compassion. Like most celebrated preachers Guthrie quoted hardly at all, and almost never did he quote poetry. But there was one bit of verse that he did use occasionally, and which he called "My Favorite Motto"—and a good motto too, for all preachers of the message of the compassionate Christ—

I live for those that love me,
For those who know me true,
For the heaven that smiles above me,
And waits my coming too;
For the cause that needs assistance,
For the wrongs that need resistance,
For the future in the distance,
For the good that I can do.

When we attempt to separate Guthrie the preacher from Guthrie the pastor and philanthropist, and begin to examine his sermons as things by themselves, what strikes one is a feeling of wonder that sermons displaying so little freshness of idea or sequence of logic or power of demonstration could have held spellbound for more than a generation the vast throngs who heard them. But that very straightforwardness, obviousness and normality are not without their suggestion, reminding the preacher that to be brilliant or unique is not a necessary condition of great preaching. Men speak of Robertson of Brighton as the "preacher's preacher" because his sermons are so homiletically suggestive, turning a truth over and over for us, letting flashes of light play now here and now there. There is none of that delight to

be experienced in the reading of Guthrie's sermons. He sticks to the great Biblical and doctrinal themes, and generally his proposition is clearly stated in the text itself. His method is strictly topical, like all masters of the homiletic art, never wearying his hearers with cross references, or telling them what the writer had been saying on a previous chapter, or what some other writer had said on a similar subject, but taking up at once the main idea of the text. Occasionally the textual relationship to the sermon is indirect—the method that has become so popular and is so abused by preachers to-day—as when in the sermon “The World a Lie,” his text is “Thy calf, O Samaria, hast cast thee off,” his purpose being to show the unsatisfactoriness of the pleasures of the world; or when he takes the lament of David over Jonathan, “Thy love unto me was wonderful” as the text for a sermon on “The Love of Christ.” But as a rule, he selects for his text one that contains, without need of change of time or circumstance or characters, the propositions of the sermon, as the sermon on “The Christian's Strength,” from the text, “Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thee” (Ps. xxvii. 14) or on “The Fullness of Christ,” from the text, “It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell.” His texts never startle, surprise, or create even a legitimate curiosity.

Guthrie was a firm believer in the theory and practice of Paley who once wrote—to students for the ministry, “Disdain not the old fashion of dividing your sermon into heads; a discourse which rejects these aids to perspicuity will turn out a bewildering rhapsody, without aim or effect, order or conclusion.”

As for the outlines of his sermon they recall Newman Hall's comment, quoting what had been said of the sermon preached by a Welsh preacher, “There was nothing peculiar in the sermon—old bones.” So one says to oneself turning over the pages of Guthrie's sermons, Old bones indeed! bones that generations of preachers have carefully picked

over. The outlines are just what a teacher of homiletics would get from a middler or a senior class. Here are a few examples :

On "Temptation," from the text of James i. 13-15, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." I. The importance of the subject. II. The source of temptation is not in God. III. The source of temptation is in ourselves. IV. Our corrupt nature acted on by temptation is the source of sin. V. The end of sin is death.

Or this on "The Love of Christ," "Thy love to me was wonderful," II Sam. i. 26. I. Because there was nothing in us lovely. II. Because there was nothing in us loving. III. This love is wonderful in its expression.

Or this on "The Reconciler," "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself," Col. i. 20. I. By nature man is at enmity with God. II. God desires to be reconciled to his enemies. III. To make our peace with God Jesus laid down his life.

Ordinary, commonplace, obvious, you say. Yet the themes of the sermons and the divisions of them are the clear and plain statement of the great facts of the Christian religion. Guthrie never, unconsciously or by effort, gives a unique or unusual statement of any Christian truth. He takes the familiar truths, the great commonplaces of the Christian revelation, and speaks about them in a way that everybody understands. He would be called platitudinous, by those, who, in their effort to escape the ordinary and familiar, sometimes get away from the Gospel altogether. But platitudinous or not, Guthrie is always sensible and reasonable. His platform may be evident and ordinary, but it is broad and substantial.

As you read the sermons, or in imagination listen to the preacher, you discover too that there is a man talking who knows and understands the average man. It is to that average man that he is addressing himself. The listener that your mind pictures waiting upon these sermons is not the philosopher or metaphysician or mystic dreamer, but

the average man and the average woman. There were indeed plenty of poets and statesmen and philosophers who came to hear him, but always it is the average man who is being spoken to in these sermons. You feel that they are being addressed by a sensible man who takes for granted certain common facts of human nature. So it is that these very traits which make Guthrie, of all the great preachers the most intolerable to read—the plain straightforward texts, and obvious divisions of the theme, and undisguised and easily comprehended comments upon God, the Bible, life and destiny—were also his strength as an oral preacher.

When we turn from the bones of the sermons and their observations to their color, fragrance and tone, it is an altogether different matter. Now we come upon Guthrie the painter, the story teller, the illustrator. When he lay upon his deathbed at St. Leonard's he took up a mirror and examined his face, saying that he was doing as the sailor did who climbed to the masthead to try if he could see land. And when his sight began to fail him he likened it to land birds alighting on the mast and letting the weary mariner know that he was near to the desired haven. Keep in mind those two scenes, Guthrie with the ragged children taking refuge under his arms, and Guthrie on his deathbed, with the mirror in his hand likening himself to the sailor on the masthead, and you have before you the two chief characteristics and excellencies of his preaching—his compassion and his power of illustration.

The gift, of course, must have been in him from the beginning, else he could not have painted as he did. But the peculiar thing about the illustrative style of Guthrie is that it was consciously and deliberately acquired. His first sermons showed little or nothing of the pictorial style which afterwards made him famous. His assumption of the anecdotal and illustrative method was due to the discovery made at Arbilot that the portions of his sermons which 'stuck' were the illustrations. Instead of the usual second service he inaugurated at Arbilot a Sunday evening class

for the young people. At this class he catechised the young men and young women and went over with them the sermon of the morning. He was surprised and humiliated to discover how little of his carefully prepared sermon he could get from them. To aid them he set forth the topics of the sermon by illustrations drawn from nature, history, the world. This illustrative practice, and the fact that what they did remember of any sermon was the story or the illustration, and his own increasing ability to use illustrations, caused him to change his whole manner of preaching. Describing the change Dr. McCosh says of him, "He made shrewd practical remarks, told anecdotes of what he had seen and heard, and used illustrations from country life and scenes in which the people were interested." I shall let Guthrie tell his own story:

"When I went to Arbilot, I knew pretty well how to speak sermons, but very little about how to compose them; so I set myself vigorously to study how to illustrate the great truths of the gospel, and enforce them, so that there should be no sleepers in the church, no wandering eyes, but everywhere an eager attention. Savingly to convert my hearers was not within my power; but to command their attention, to awaken their interest, to instruct their minds was—and I determined to do it.

"With this end, I used the simplest, plainest terms, avoiding anything vulgar, but always, where possible, employing the Saxon tongue, the mother tongue of my hearers. I studied the style of the addresses which the ancient and inspired prophets delivered to the people of Israel, and saw how, differing from dry disquisitions or a naked statement of truths, they abounded in metaphors, figures and illustrations. I turned to the Gospels and found that He who knew what was in man, what could best illuminate a subject, win the attention and move the heart, used parables or illustrations, stories, comparisons, drawn from the scenes of nature and familiar life, to a large extent in His teaching; in regard to which a woman—type of the masses—said, 'The parts of the Bible that I like best are the likes.'

"Taught by such models, and encouraged in my resolution by such authorities, I resolved to follow, though it should be at a vast distance, these ancient masters of the art of preaching; being all the more ready to do so, as it

would be in harmony with the natural turn and bent of my own mind.

"I was careful to observe by the faces of my hearers and also by the account the more intelligent of my Sunday evening class gave of my discourses, the style and character of those parts which had made the deepest impression, that I might cultivate it.

"After my discourse was written, I spent hours in correcting it; latterly always for that purpose keeping a blank page on my manuscript opposite a written one, cutting out dry bits, giving point to dull ones, making clear any obscurity, and narrative parts more graphic, throwing more pathos into appeals, and copying God in His works by adding the ornamental to the useful. The longer I have lived and composed, I have acted more and more according to the saying of Sir Joshua Reynolds in his 'Lectures on Painting,' that God does not give excellence to men but as the reward of labour.

"To this, with my style of delivery, and self possession, and command and flexibility of voice, and power of throwing myself into the characters I was depicting,—and feeling their emotions, and expressing them in such language, and looks, and tones as they would themselves have done, I attribute the 'popularity' which I early gained and maintained for well nigh forty years of a public ministry."

For the groundwork of his preaching Guthrie had the rugged and grand doctrines of the Christian religion. He was no metaphysician, keen in speculative thought, nor was he a deep searcher of the things of the inner life of the soul, but the solid foundations of the Christian revelation were always underneath him, and he never committed the blunder that makes all great preaching impossible, that is, dealing only with the low themes of prudential ethics. He may not have been a mystic or a speculative seer, but he never descended to the low platform of a mere moralist, and the redemptive truths of Christianity are always in the background. With this went his shrewd common sense and his wide knowledge of men. "Great masses of practical wisdom came out. People did not say, but they felt 'that man knows what is in my heart; he speaks to my experience, to what I have passed through; he knows my labors and my

troubles, and I feel that I can trust him and take him as my adviser.' ”

In his dealing with the familiar ground of Christian doctrine Guthrie went on the correct theory that out of the heart are the issues of religion and life. He preached to the common sense of men, but also to the common heart of men. He knew that men had hearts, emotions, and he sought in every way to make the chords of the heart vibrate. It was probably this legitimate appeal to the heart that made Guthrie, in spite of the fact that he was not a deep expounder of Scripture nor a close reasoner, a favorite preacher for intellectual men like Hugh Miller, Lord Cockburn, and many others. Lord Cockburn, asked one morning where he was going to church, answered, “Oh, I’m going to hae a greet with Guthrie.” Dr. McCosh speaks of the crowds that would flock to hear him when he came to Arbroath to preach on a summer evening and thus comments on the emotional quality of his preaching: “Some hard men thought of him that his discourses were not very logical; some finical men and women regarded his Forfarshire pronounciation as very broad and his illustrations rather vivid; but they all went to hear him, because they got their hearts warmed.”

Guthrie wisely chose to dwell more in his sermons upon the dramatic and tragic side of life, and his power to move the feelings had full opportunity for exhibition as he described the miseries of the destitute in the city’s darksome dens, the perils of the shipwrecked, and the emotions of men in any of the tense moments of life. When he was called to Edinburgh a number of his co-presbyters gathered about him and said, “Mr. Guthrie, you must change your style of preaching when you have to appear before an audience so polished as that of Edinburgh.” His friend McCosh heard of this silly counsel and implored him not to alter his mode of speaking, assuring him that human nature is much the same everywhere, and that what had moved the people of Arbilot and Arbroath would also move the people of Edinburgh.” No greater absurdity was ever put forth

than to say of this or that acceptable preacher that the qualities which endear him to one class of hearers will not appeal to those of a different class as well. In the great depths men are all the same, and he who can speak to the heart that is in man, can reach and interest any class of men. Guthrie tells us:

“In view of going to Edinburgh I had resolved to adhere to the same style of preaching which seemed to make me popular and acceptable at Arbilot, concluding that, as God had fashioned all men’s hearts alike, human nature was the same in the town as in the country—in ladies and gentlemen as in lads and lassies. There were not two Gospels; and I knew from the example of our Saviour’s discourses that the highest taste might be gratified by one of whom it might be said, ‘the common people heard him gladly.’ I had read how ministers who were popular in the country, lost all their attractions and failed when they were taken to Edinburgh. Fancying that they must adopt there a superior and more intellectual style of preaching, they abandoned their natural and efficient for a stiff and stilted manner. On this, which has proved to many a rock ahead, I resolved not to make shipwreck; while, at the same time, I resolved to spare no pains, nor toil nor time in careful preparation, in making my descriptions graphic, my statements lucid, my appeals pathetic, in filling my discourses, in fact, with what would both strike and stick.”

Charles Wolfe, the celebrated author of those perfect lines, “The Burial of Sir John Moore,” was also a preacher of unusual originality and poetic charm. He left behind him some very helpful suggestions to preachers. Among these hints is the following: “Bring in familiar topics. Begin naturally and easily, but so as to excite curiosity—with an incident or anecdote. Begin in an original and striking but sedate manner.” Thomas Guthrie’s sermons are splendid examples of introductions which are sedate, but striking and original, and which excite curiosity.

In this effort to make things strike and stick the introductions to his sermons afford an interesting study. He seems determined to say that which will at once strike the mind and eye of the hearer, rather than commence indifferently, contextually, platitudinously, and then slowly

"work up." He regarded that first paragraph as one of the most important portions of his sermons, and in many of his sermons it must be confessed that, so far as the reading of the sermons is concerned, the introductions are the most interesting part. The introduction in its remoteness, and his hearers must have been at a loss to see what he would be at, often excited curiosity; but regardless of any connection with the main theme, the introduction itself was worth listening to. Anecdotes of war, shipwreck, biographical notes, storms, descriptions of the work of man or the work of nature, these are the doors through which we enter the sermons of Guthrie. Almost any sermon that you turn to is an example of this method of introduction. Let me recall a number of them. In the sermon on "I the Lord have spoken it," or the "Security of the Believer," he commences thus:

"When on a sultry summer day the sky gets overcast, and angry clouds gather thick upon its brow, and bush and brake are silent, and the very cattle, like human beings, draw close together, standing dumb in their untasted pastures, and while there is no ripple on the lake, nor leaf stirring on the tree, all nature seems struck with awe, and stands in trembling expectation; then, when the explosion comes, and a blinding stream of fire leaps from the cloud, and as if heaven's riven vault were tumbling down upon our head, the thunders crash, peal, roar along the sky, he has neither poetry nor piety nor sense, who does not reverently bow his head and assent to the words of David, 'The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.'"

The purpose of this description of the majesty of God's voice in the storm is to prepare the way for showing a yet greater majesty which the ear of faith hears when God declares His promises to His people. Another good example of this kind of introduction is that to the sermon "In Trial," on the text, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (St. James i. 2):

"There is an old story of two knights who fell into a quarrel, almost into a combat, about a shield—the one asserting, and prepared with sword to maintain, that the shield

was made of gold; the other as positively asserting that it was not gold but silver. Both were right; and there was no more occasion for quarrel between them than there has often been between good men in religious controversy. Looking at a doctrine from different points of view, not having the same standpoint, as it is called, they quarreled, and the quarrel was a mistake."

All this was to open the way for a discussion about the two meanings of the word temptation. In the sermon on "God's Motive in Salvation"—"I do this for mine holy name's sake," (Ezekiel xxvi. 22), Guthrie begins with a long account of the river Nile, its sources, its irrigation of the desert, its monunments and empires, and then turns to the river of the Gospel as it has flowed down through the ages. In the sermon on "The Kingdom of Christ"—"Translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son"—he begins with a description of the crown jewels of Scotland in the Castle. Vulgar curiosity sees nothing but gems and sword and sceptre, and the multitude go away to talk of their value or their beauty. But the eyes of a patriot sees more than that:

"He looks with deep and meditative interest on that rim of gold, not for its intrinsic value, but because it once encircled the brow of Scotland's greatest king,—the hero of her independence, Robert the Bruce. His fancy sees a nations in arms. Now he hears the shout of Bannockburn, and now, the long wail of Flodden. The events of centuries, passed in weary war, roll by before her. The red flames burst from lonely fortalice and busy town; the smiling vale, with its happy homesteads, lies desolate; scaffolds reek with the blood of patriots; courage grapples with despair. It is the interests that were at stake, the fight for liberty, the good blood shed, it is these, not the jewels, which in a patriot's eye make that a costly crown—a relic of the olden time, worthy of a nation's pride and jealous preservation."

One of the finest pieces of description to be met with in the sermons of Guthrie, indeed, one of the noblest passages in modern homilies, is the introduction to his sermon on "The Sins and Sorrows of the City"—"When he beheld the city, he wept over it" (Luke xix:41), where he likens the

submerged forests of the ocean pavement to the submerged masses of the city, the physical subsidence with the moral:

"There is a remarkable phenomenon to be seen on certain parts of our coast. Strange to say, it proves, notwithstanding such expressions as "the stable and solid land," that it is not the land but the sea which is the stable element. On some summer day when there is not a wave to rock her, nor breath of wind to fill her sail or fan a cheek, you launch your boat upon the waters, and, pulling out beyond lowest tide-mark, you idly lie upon her bows to catch the silvery glance of a passing fish, or watch the movements of the many curious creatures that travel the sea's sandy bed, or creeping out of their rocky homes, wander its tangled mazes. If the traveller is surprised to find a deep sea shell imbedded in the marbles of a mountain peak, how great is your surprise to see beneath you a vegetation foreign to the deep! Below your boat, submerged many feet beneath the surface of the lowest tide, away down in those green crystal depths, you see no rusting anchor, no mouldering remains of some shipwrecked one, but in the standing stumps of trees the mouldering vestiges of a forest, where once the wild cat prowled, and the birds of heaven, singing their loves, had nestled and nursed their young. In counterpart to those portions of our coast where sea hollowed caves, with sides the waves have polished, and floors still strewn with shells and sand, now stand high above the level of the strongest stream-tides, there stand these dead, decaying trees,—entombed in the deep. A strange phenomenon, which admits of no other explanation than this, that there the coast line has sunk beneath its ancient level.

"Many of our cities present a phenomenon as melancholy to the eye of a philanthropist, as the other is interesting to a philosopher, or geologist. In their economical, educational, moral and religious aspects, certain parts of the city bear palpable evidence of a corresponding subsidence. Not a single house, nor a block of houses, but whole streets, once from end to end the homes of decency and industry, and wealth and rank and piety, have been engulfed. A flood of ignorance and sin now breaks and roars above the tops of their highest tenements. Nor do the old stumps of a forest, still standing up erect beneath the sea wave, indicate a greater change, a deeper subsidence than the relics of ancient grandeur, and the touching memorials of piety which yet

linger about those wretched dwellings, like the evening twilight on the hills, like some trace of beauty on a corpse."

In the sermon on "Trial" Guthrie employs 27 illustrations. Of these 10 are from the Bible, 2 from history, 1 from literature, 1 from personal experience, 5 from nature, 6 from common life and occupations, and 1 from poetry. Let us take up the volume of sermons, *The Gospel in Ezekiel*, and note the illustrations in the first sermon that comes under our eye. It happens to be the sermon "Man Justified," "Then will I sprinkle, clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean" (Ezekiel xxvi. 25). Our examination yields the following result: 24 illustrations, including similes and metaphors, are employed. Listening to these illustrations this is what the man in Guthrie's church would have seen before the sermon was over: Martha cumbered with care in serving the supper to Jesus; the woodbine and the ivy embracing the tree with their arms; bubbles colored with rainbow hues and bursting at the touch; a man stretched on the bed of death; a river flowing through the meadow and reflecting in its bosom the heavens above; the old covenant of Eden, "Do this and live"; the Nile and the Ganges with their many mouths into the sea; a tree dividing itself into two great branches, or trunks; the door of heaven guarded like the gate of a treasure house or a citadel with two iron bolts; the Scottish emigrants in America carrying their superstitions with them and seeing the fairies dance upon the green; Lazarus coming out of his grave; Guthrie baptizing a dying infant as it lay on the expiring mother's breast, to the baptism of the church being added the baptism of the father's tears; the extent, origin and uses of water; the lost traveller on the reeling desert, with bloodshot eyes, and his throat as black as dust; the red heifer of Old Testament ceremonial; two men starting off in opposite directions and meeting each other on the opposite side of the globe; the hunter, like the devil, or the minister who tries to hide hell, spreading a covering over the pit for the game. What a panorama it has been! There were no moving pictures in

those days, but those who listened to Guthrie preach saw the passing show of life in all parts of the world and in all ages of the world.

Most of the illustrative parts of Guthrie's sermons are elaborated descriptions; but now and then there is the flash of a clause or a sentence which lights up the whole scene for us, as when he refers to Joshua and how he "stopped the glowing axles of the sun," or how Christ "threw a zone of mercy around the world"; or where, wishing to illustrate the soul's longing for heaven he describes a Scotchman or an Englishman, exiled in the tropics: "Where the palm tree waves its graceful plumes, and birds of jeweled lustre flash and flicker among gorgeous flowers, the exile sits staring upon vacancy; a far away home lies on his heart; and borne on the wings of fancy over intervening seas and lands, he has swept away home, and hears the lark singing above his father's fields, and sees his fair haired brother, with light foot and childhood's glee, chasing the butterfly by his native stream. And in his best hours, home, his own sinless home—a home with his father above that starry sky—will be the wish of every Christian man."

To the preacher who is discouraged by reading the sermons of a man like Guthrie and feels that all this is the work of genius, and that try as he may he can do but poorly, it will be reassuring and stimulating to know that these sermons were not struck off in the heat of the moment in the study, nor created in the excitement of the pulpit, but carefully, almost painfully worked out. He had great powers of improvisation and no readier speaker ever went upon a platform or into a pulpit, and his discourses had all the appearance of extempore addresses. But that was because of the thoroughness with which he had done his work. He wrote every line and carefully committed the sermon to memory. If, in memorizing the sermon, he came upon a passage that was difficult to hold in the memory he rewrote it, believing that what he could not recall easily was not clearly stated. He vocalized his sermons as he wrote them,

but was careful not to vocalize as he memorized, lest the sermon should become stale, and ever kept the congregation before him, so that the sermon when finished was not a meditation, or essay, or speculation, but a sermon, an address to men and women upon the subject of gravest import. So McCosh bears witness: "During all the seven years he was at Arbilot, I believe he never entered the pulpit without having his discourse written and committed. Had he acted in any other way, he might have been left in Arbilot all his life, greatly esteemed, no doubt, in the district, but without ever occupying the wide sphere which God opened to him. Even in writing he kept an audience before his mind's eye, and he prepared not an abstract essay, but an address to be spoken to men and women, to young men and maidens. I have often found him on the Saturday night amending and correcting what he had written, and filling his mind with the subject. His illustrative style made his discourse more easily remembered by himself, as it was more easily remembered by his audience."

We have noted the deliberate plan of Guthrie to preach pictorially. He used to speak of the three chief rules of preaching as the "Three P's"—Painting, Proving, and Persuading. With him the whole emphasis was on the painting. We have noted also the painstaking method of preparation. He counted on eighteen hours each week for his sermon preparation, from six to nine in the morning each day. "A practice this, I would recommend to all ministers, whether in town or country. It secures ample time for pulpit preparation, brings a man fresh every day to his allotted portion of work, keeps his sermon simmering in his mind all the week through, till the subject takes entire possession of him, and as the consequence, he comes on Sunday to the pulpit to preach with fullness, feeling and power."

As for the man and his manner in action in the pulpit a few witnesses will suffice—

Dr. McCosh:

"At this moment I see him before me on the pulpit.

He was tall, six feet two, bony and somewhat gaunt. His voice was loud but mellow; he could modulate it well, and at times it became low and pathetic."

Lord Cockburn:

"Practical and natural; passionate without vehemence; with perfect self possession, and always generous and devoted, he is a very powerful preacher. His language and accent are very Scotch, but nothing can be less vulgar, and his gesture, which seems as unthought about as a child's, is the most graceful I have ever seen in any public speaker. He deals in the broad expository Ovidian page, and is comprehended and felt by the poor woman on the steps of the pulpit as thoroughly as by the strangers who are attracted solely by his eloquence. Everything he does glows with a frank, gallant warmheartedness rendered more delightful by a boyish simplicity of air and style."

He had before him a single sheet of paper with the heads of the sermon written on it. His manner was easy and voice strong, but not roaring. "The more easy your manner, without losing the character of seriousness and solemnity, so much the better. Vigor and birr, without roaring and bellowing, are ever to be aimed at." Guthrie always had the inspiration of an eager throng as he preached. Some who could not gain admission to the church used to sit on the roof, near the ventilators, where they could hear, though they saw not.

Another hearer says of him:

"He had all the external attractions of a pulpit orator; an unusually tall and commanding person, with an abundance of easy and powerful, because natural, gesture; a quickly and strongly expressive countenance, which age rendered finer as well as more comely (for in early and middle manhood it was gaunt, with a dusky complexion, overshadowed by lank black hair); a powerful, clear and musical voice, the intonations of which were varied and appropriate, managed with an actor's skill, though there was not the least appearance of art."

It is interesting to see how similar are the anecdotes of the effects of the sermons of celebrated preachers. This of

Guthrie, told by an eye witness, the Rev. George Hay, has an apocryphal note to it, but there seems to be no good reason for doubting it:

“During one of Dr. Guthrie’s powerful appeals to the unbeliever to close with the free offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, he described a shipwreck and the launching of the lifeboat to save the perishing crew in such vivid colors, that the dreadful scene appeared actually to take place before our eyes. Captain C—, a young naval officer, who was sitting in a front seat of the gallery, was so electrified that he seemed to lose all consciousness of what was around him. I saw him spring to his feet, and begin to take off his coat, when his mother took hold of him and pulled him down.”

In 1867, three years after he gave up his preaching in Edinburgh, Dr. Guthrie, in company with Principal Fairbairn and Mr. Wells, sailed for America for a visitation of the churches there. By the time the ship reached Queens-town Guthrie was in such distress that he abandoned the voyage. A friend meeting him in Edinburgh shortly after said with surprise, “Why, doctor, I thought you had gone to the New World?” “Ah,” replied Guthrie, “had I not left the ship at Queenstown, it would have been, not the New World but the ‘other’ world.”

In his discourse at the funeral of Guthrie Dr. Candlish said, “Men of talents, men of abilities, men of learning, are not uncommon. Men powerful in thought and speech are often raised up. But genius, real poetic genius like Guthrie’s, comes but once in many generations. We shall not look upon his like soon, if ever.” Despite the verdict of this distinguished contemporary the student of Guthrie reaches the conclusion that he was a man of marked talent, rather than a man of genius. His carefully planned preparation for the pulpit in no way indicates a man of genius, such as Beecher certainly was. There was a gift of fancy and illustration, and a glowing sympathy and compassion. But the fire of genius, so far as the matter is concerned, was not there. It is as a man of talent that Guthrie is an encourage-

ment and suggestion to his fellow preachers. His career was based on loyalty to the Christian revelation, wide knowledge of men, common sense, good education, a reasonable degree of talent, tireless industry and a definite plan in preaching. He determined to make familiar Christian truths "strike and stick" by reason of the way in which he illustrated them. He succeeded.

He had hoped to have a quick translation like Chalmers, but his last battle was long and desperate. He who had described so many deathbed scenes now learned that he had told only half the truth: "I have often seen death beds. I have often described them; but I had no conception until now what hard work dying really is. Ah, my dear children, you see I am now as helpless in your arms as you ever were in mine." Near the end he asked his family to sing, and being asked what he would like, answered, "Give me a bairn's hymn." Thus, with a "bairn's hymn" sounding in his ear, he who had "thrown a zone of mercy" around helpless childhood, passed over to see for himself those wondrous things which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and which have not entered into the mind of man, not even into Guthrie's mind, so fertile in illustration and rich in imagination.

Philadelphia.

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY.