

Some Preachers of Scotland *Samuel Rutherford, and His Contemporaries*

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Whatever may be thought of the great preachers of Scotland in the covenanting period, it is certain that, judged by the present standard of manners and culture, they stood in the foremost rank among the scholars of their time. Samuel Rutherford, for example, at the close of his own studies at the University of Edinburgh was appointed one of its regents or professors—a striking proof of his abilities and attainments. A similar distinction was conferred on two of his contemporaries, David Dickson and Robert Blair, by the University of Glasgow.

On leaving Edinburgh, Rutherford became Minister of Anwoth in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. The church lies in a hollow, embosomed in wood, and seems the very ideal of a country church. Gordon of Earlston, afterwards Viscount Kenmure, was one of the landowners, a man of eminent godliness and of a family most attached to the church. Rutherford's first sermon was from John ix. 39—rather a strange text: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

In the very first years of his ministry he had

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a sharp lesson in the school of affliction. His wife suffered from a most painful illness. For thirteen months before her death she was in almost constant agony, crying out at night in paroxysms of pain. Among his people Rutherford was a marvel of diligence. Up at three in the morning, he had done much work among his books before the day had well begun. It was said of him that he was "always praying, always preaching, always visiting families, always visiting the sick, always catechising, always teaching in the school, always writing treatises, always reading and studying." The fervour of his preaching was remarkable—the earnestness with which he preached Christ. Many came from great distances to his church. So earnest was he for the good of his people that he could say: "My witness is in heaven, your heaven would be two heavens to me, and your salvation two salvations." And of his prayers: "There I wrestled with the angel and prevailed. Woods, trees, meadows and hills are my witnesses that I drew one fair match between Christ and Anwoth."

But the enemy could not but try to sow tares in so goodly a field. In 1636, nine years after his settlement, he was called before the High Commission Court on account of his non-conformity to the Episcopal government of the church, and banished from Anwoth. His Patmos was Aberdeen, then conspicuous for its zeal in the opposite cause. Here many of the "Letters" were written by which he is so well known. Two years later, he returned to his beloved Anwoth; but next year he was removed to St. Andrew's, where he became Professor of Divinity and Principal of St. Mary's. He had now no pastoral charge, but it is said that before accepting the chair, he bargained that he should be allowed to preach somewhere every Sunday, so much did he delight

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to proclaim the love of God in Christ.

In the painful dispute among the Presbyterian ministers, known as the controversy of Resolutioners and Protesters, Rutherford took part with the latter, the unyielding party, and sometimes he manifested no little sharpness of temper in reference to this. On one occasion when he was expected to address a table at the administration of the Lord's Supper, he sullenly refused to do so, because he saw at it the wife of one of his brethren, who was a "resolutioner." It fell to him, however, to preach on the evening, and it was remarked that he was quite feeble: "he was quite deserted." On another occasion he did better. After he had made some reference to these unhappy differences, he exclaimed: "Woe is unto us because of these divisions that make us lose the fair scent of the rose of Sharon I "And then, says one of his friends," he broke out commending Christ, going over all His precious titles and styles about a quarter of an hour," his friend exclaiming, "Now you are right, hold you, there!"

An early treatise against the Arminians on Grace, and the circulation of his Letters, made Rutherford's name well known beyond his own country. The story of the visit of Archbishop Usher has often been told. It is said that having heard of Rutherford's remarkable power in preaching, the archbishop resolved in going to England to take Scotland on the way, and to go to Anwoth to hear him preach. We give the story in the words of an old minister who took particular pains to collect such anecdotes. "There was no place near the church where he might stay that Saturday's night but Mr. Rutherford's house; and so he came to it, and called to know if he was at home. His wife told he was. He said he was a stranger come from some distance, and designed to stay till Monday, and could find no place to stay in, and asked if he might have access to Mr. Rutherford's house. Mrs. Rutherford, seeing him a gentleman and in good habit, desired him to alight, and signified that she desired to know his name. He said his name was James Usher. She went up and acquainted her husband. The primate struck none of them in the head [was not recognised] and Mr. Rutherford came down and called for a drink and made him welcome as a stranger, and left him till supper, where nothing passed to discover him. On the Sabbath early he went out to the fields and came to a thicket of trees, a sweet retired place where Mr. Rutherford used often to retire. There the bishop spent some time his lone, and was fallen to prayer. When Mr. Rutherford came out, as was his ordinary, knowing nothing, the other was there till he drew near and heard the voice of prayer; and listening he perceived a very extraordinary gift of prayer and was wonderfully taken with it, and stayed till it was ended, and the other came out. Then, when he saw him, his name his wife told him struck him in the head and he presently addressed him: Are you the great and learned Doctor Usher?' The other answered, 'I am he whom some are pleased to term so.' Then Mr. Rutherford embraced him most affectionately, and said, You must preach for me to-day.' 'Nay,' says the other, I came to hear you preach, and to be acquainted with you, and I will hear you. 'Well,' says the other, 'I shall take the forenoon and you the afternoon.' And so the primate preached in the afternoon, to each other's great satisfaction."

Rutherford lived to the age of sixty, but he lived in troublous times. He was one of the Scotch commissioners to the Westminster Assembly in 1643, and as the journey to London in those days was about as serious an undertaking as a journey to the centre of Africa to-day, some years were spent in England. His contributions to theological literature were both numerous and ponderous. His *Lex Rex* was a remarkable book, showing that the law was above the king, not the king above the law—a real foundation-stone of national liberty. But a more complete contrast could not be

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than that between the gushing, sparkling poetry of his letters and his sermons and the dry bare logic of his controversial books. At the Restoration, in 1660, he was deprived of his situation, and received a summons to appear before the ensuing Parliament and answer to a charge of high treason. Meanwhile, however, a messenger reached him from a higher court; he died in a state of rapturous joy, his last words being those on which Mrs. Cousin has con-

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structed her beautiful hymn, "Glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land."

Very conspicuous among the contemporaries of Rutherford was David Dickson, of Irvine. The tradition goes that his parents had been married for a considerable time without having any child, and like the parents of Samuel they asked one of the Lord, and vowed him to the ministry. When the child grew up, forgetful of their vow, they made him a merchant, but in that calling he was most unsuccessful, costing them thousand upon thousand of pounds, till, remembering their vow, they got him to abandon mercantile life and become a minister after all. And as a minister he had wonderful success. When he was settled at Irvine, people used to come there from other parts of Scotland just to enjoy the privilege, as they called it, of being under the drop of his ministry. Wodrow says that his sermons were "full of solid substantial matter, very Scriptural and in a very familiar style, not low, but exceedingly strong, plain and affecting, somewhat akin to Mr. Rutherford's in his admirable letters." In a time of political trouble, he was banished to Turriff in the north of Aberdeenshire, as if the cold spiritual atmosphere of the north would cool down his zeal. The change had this effect on him, that to prepare his sermons he needed as many days as hours at Irvine. This he ascribed to the agency of evil spirits, the devils of the north, he said, were much worse than the devils of the west. There was not a little superstition and belief in the supernatural among the good men of those times. At the death of the Countess of Eglintoun he heard a loud noise like that of trumpets; he thought it must be some noblemen coming to the house; when no natural cause for it could be discovered he ascribed it to the ministry of angels.

Dickson was appointed professor of divinity successively at Glasgow and at Edinburgh. When he came to Edinburgh, it was observed that his preaching was not accompanied by the same spiritual power as of old. He ascribed this to the want of the prayers of his people, who had been well trained at Irvine, to ask the Divine blessing on his preaching; whereas, preaching here and there in Edinburgh, he had not the benefit of his Aarons and Hurs. He was successful likewise as an author, and his Commentary on the Psalms has been pronounced by Mr. Spurgeon as "a rich volume dropping fatness." "The Sum of Saving Knowledge," commonly bound up with copies of the Westminster Confession of Faith, was his handiwork, composed, it is said, during his walks among the crags near Glasgow Cathedral. He thought that the Confession of Faith and the Catechism were too deep for popular understanding, and his object was to simplify them. For these documents themselves he had the profoundest reverence. In the contest already adverted to, between Resolutioners and Protesters, Dickson took the side of the Resolutioners, the less thorough-going party. He was reproached for surrendering the covenanted cause, and asked what they would have for all the blood and prayers of these many years. His answer was, "The Confession and Catechisms; they are worth more than all the blood and prayers that have ever been."

The last act of his life was a very touching one. He said he had taken all his good deeds and all

his bad deeds and cast them through each other in a heap before the Lord, and fled from both, and betaken himself to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom he had peace. Then he called his family together, said something to each, and gravely and solemnly pronounced the apostolic benediction; after which he put up his hand and closed his eyes, and expired without struggle or pain.

A remarkable preacher of the same type, but with more natural sprightliness of character, was William Guthrie, of Fenwick. His father was a landed proprietor, of good family connection, but estates in those days were commonly much smaller than they are now. Had Guthrie not come very powerfully under the influence of Divine grace, which he did under the instrumentality of Samuel Rutherford, at St. Andrews, he would probably have been a jolly, roving, rollicking man of the world. After his change, some of the features of his natural temperament remained, but everything he was and everything he had was consecrated to the service of his Master. The oldest of his family, the paternal estate fell to him, but he made it over to the only one of five brothers who did not enter upon the ministry, in order that he might have no distraction in his ministerial work.

The parish of Fenwick, in Ayrshire, was a very rude one; it had had no church till one was built in which Guthrie ministered, and which remains to the present day. His ministry here was so successful that in a short time a wonderful change came over the barbarous people. "They were almost all persuaded to attend public ordinances, and to set up the worship of God in their families; and scarce was there a house in the whole parish that did not bring forth some fruits of his ministry and afford some real converts to a religious life." The accounts that are given of the variety and excellence of his gifts almost exceed belief. That he was a most lively, powerful, eloquent and acceptable preacher, is beyond doubt; lonely and wild though Fenwick was, people came to reside in it, as some did likewise in Irvine, and ran up houses on the glebe, to enjoy his ministry. In prayer likewise he excelled; he was most assiduous in visiting and catechising his flock; his services at the sick-bed and death-bed were proverbial; while young men were special objects of his care, and were wonderfully attracted by his winning ways. Moreover, he was a scholar and a theologian; of the little book by which he is best known, "The Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ," John Owen used to say that there was more theology in it than in all his folios. Yet Guthrie died at the age of forty-six. And his health was far from good. It was necessary for him to be much in the open air, and he was fond of fishing. In his early days at Fenwick, in the incognito of his fishing costume, he would sometimes fall in with a remote

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parishioner, and among other things ask him if he had been in the new church. Working on his curiosity, he would persuade him to promise to go. When the man went, to his astonishment, his fisher friend appeared in the pulpit and showed himself no mean practitioner as a fisher of men. To all his other gifts Guthrie added an extraordinary flow of humour. In this, as in other respects, his likeness to the Thomas Guthrie of modern times was very remarkable. Dining once with a company of brethren whom he had kept in a state of merriment during the whole progress of the meal, he was asked, according to an old custom, to offer prayer at the end. This he did with the utmost reverence, gravity, and earnestness, to the great astonishment of a very grave, excellent divine, James Durham, who could not help exclaiming: "O William, if I had been so merry as you have been, I could have been in no frame of prayer for eight and forty hours!"

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John Livingstone, of Ancrum, was another of the most rousing and successful preachers of the time. His first great success was achieved before he was settled in any charge of his own, when he preached as a probationer for a minister in the neighbourhood of his father's house, at the Kirk of Shotts, in Lanarkshire, on a Monday after the administration of the Lord's Supper. There was much earnest feeling abroad at the time, and much prayer was offered for the Divine blessing. Livingstone had spent a great part of the night between the Sunday and the Monday with some praying people, earnestly imploring the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. But on the Monday morning he felt so little disposed to preach that he wondered whether he might not steal away to his father's house and leave some one else to do the work for which he felt so unable. Rallying, however, he faced his duty, and, preaching from the text, "A new heart also will I give you," he made so powerful an application that five hundred souls were reckoned to have been converted. This and other experiences taught Livingstone that for spiritual impression in the pulpit it was as necessary that the heart be prepared as the head; his great aim was to get his own soul so saturated with truth, so pervaded by the spirit of love, so absorbed in the great work of drawing men to the Lord, that his preaching should be like rivers of living water gushing out from the very centre of his being.

Livingstone's first charge was in the north of Ireland. It was known that he had scruples against Episcopacy, so he was sent away. The Ulster colonists were a very rough lot, but a marvellous revival took place. With spiritual blessing came temporal prosperity, and a foundation was laid of abiding good. But the bishops loved not the Presbyterian divines. At one time, with other Presbyterian ministers and friends, he set sail for New England in search of the religious liberty that her shores presented, and had nearly reached his destination when a fearful storm drove the vessel back. Ultimately he became minister of Stranraer, and thereafter of Ancrum; but at the Restoration of King Charles he was banished to Holland, where at the time of his death he was busy with the preparation of a Polyglot Bible.

Such were the kind of preachers—and there were many more of the same type—that so deeply moved a large section of the Scottish people, and by God's grace impressed on them so memorable a stamp. It were a great mistake to suppose that their strength lay merely in a particular form of church government, or a particular style of worship. It lay in their profound regard for the revelation of God's grace in Jesus Christ; in their profound conviction that by no other means could men be effectually blessed either for time or for eternity; and in their resolute and fearless determination to preserve and protect the river of the water of life from every admixture that would have destroyed its purity, or interfered with its life-giving power.

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