

of the English Church had shown a good example of broad-mindedness by preaching in Presbyterian churches. But this the Primus would neither encourage, nor even permit, on account of his ecclesiastical opinions. It was small wonder, therefore, if some of those whose prayers on this behalf he had endeavoured to enlist were repelled by what seemed to them a painful inconsistency.

Well, our little systems and broken lights "have their day and cease to be," but the divine beauty of a saintly life is eternal as the God from whom it proceeds; it is a treasure added to the wealth of heaven, and the memory of it enriches the traditions of earth. It remains a witness to the power of Divine grace, and a revelation of Divine glory; and such a life was the life of George Howard Wilkinson, who "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."



## Canon Fleming.<sup>1</sup>

By FREDERICK SHERLOCK.

A LIFE which touched the two extremes of royal palaces and homeless waifs was certainly worth the telling, and many will be glad to read this account of one who was essentially a popular preacher. Happily the story has been kept within the compass of 360 pages of large type, and thus compares favourably with the conventional clerical biography, which usually runs to a wearisome length. Brief as it is, however, there are obvious signs of haste in the composition, and the presence of some rather glaring "howlers" is to be regretted. The well-intentioned farewell verses showered upon Fleming by his admirers upon his leaving Bath no doubt pleased the writers and did not hurt him, but we can imagine the pungent criticism which he would have been the first to give them had he seen them served up in all the glory of large type; while, to find the doggerel on p. 79 characterized as a hymn is a grotesque touch, singularly incongruous when met with in the life of a man who had such a keen sense of rhythm and so exquisite a taste in poetry.

The main events of Fleming's life may be put into a brief paragraph. He was born in 1830, and died in 1908. He was educated at King Edward's School, Bath, 1840, Shrewsbury School, 1846-49; he took his degree at Magdalen College, Cambridge, in 1853; was curate of St. Stephen's, Ipswich, 1853-55; curate of St. Stephen's, Bath, 1855-56; minister of All Saints' Chapel, Bath, 1856-66; incumbent of Camden Church, Camberwell, 1866-73; Vicar of St. Michael's, Chester Square, 1873-1908; Canon of York, 1877-1908; succentor, 1881-82; precentor, 1883-1908; Chaplain to Queen Victoria, 1876-80; Chaplain-in-Ordinary to His Majesty, 1901-08.

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<sup>1</sup> "Life of Canon Fleming, Vicar of St. Michael's, Chester Square; Canon of York, Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the King." By the Rev. Arthur R. M. Finlayson, Vicar of Stoneaston. London: James Nisbet and Co., Ltd.

In addition to his pastoral work, he threw himself into three or four great movements with abounding ardour and enthusiasm—namely, the Temperance Propaganda, the Hospital Sunday Fund, Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and the Religious Tract Society—while if not the first to give a Penny Reading, he was certainly the one who did the most to popularize this recreative effort, especially in the city of Bath. In the way of distinguished promotion his biographer records that he declined the Deaneries of Norwich and Chester and the Bishopric of Sydney, and that Beaconsfield's desire was that Fleming should be the first Bishop of Liverpool. In the way of authorship there are no books to his credit in the publisher's catalogues, yet he edited two volumes of selections for Penny Readings which had a very wide sale, while the touching sermon which he preached at Sandringham in 1892 upon the lamented death of Prince Albert Victor has established something like a record. It was issued by Skeffingtons, under the title of "Recognition in Eternity"; the copyright was made over to Queen Alexandra, and the sales recorded in the biography total 64,000 copies, and have earned a profit of £1,685 os. 2d., which the Queen has graciously divided between two charities—the Gordon Boys' Home and the British Home for Incurables.

Such are the outstanding features of Fleming's life. A closer glance, so far as our limited space will permit, may serve to bring out one or two points worthy of being remembered.

He was of Irish birth and extraction, his father being Patrick Fleming, a medical doctor of Strabane, and his mother Mary Kirkpatrick, daughter of an officer in the army. They had five children, two daughters and three sons—Francis and William (who both became clergymen and did excellent work), and James, the youngest son, who was born at Carlow on July 26, 1830. As a boy he lived for some time at Cavan, where he came under the influence of the Rev. D. W. Preston, curate of the Parish Church, whose Bible-class he attended, and of whom he always spoke with high regard. In a few years his mother, who was now a widow, removed to Bath, and James made his first start at a big school. The following statement in his own words throws an interesting sidelight on his career.

"I well remember at the age of ten going to my first large school before I went to a public school, and in listening to my schoolfellows speaking to each other, I singled out one—only one—out of more than a hundred boys, who spoke beautifully. His silver voice and perfect intonation enchained me. It was music to listen to his voice. I resolved to try and speak like him. He and I became fast friends. . . . I first learned the music of language from his lips, in the melody of his voice, and the finished articulation of his every word. . . . Poor young Lawrie died before I left for a public school. . . . The vision of my young schoolfellow has never faded out of my life, and only when we shall meet again, and I shall look into his lustrous eyes, and once more listen to the music of his soft voice, shall he know how much I owed to him."

The common belief that Fleming received lessons in elocution from Macready, the famous tragedian, is incorrect. They were great friends, and Fleming frequently heard the great actor recite; but in the sense of ever being his pupil, his biographer tells us that it was not so.

Fleming was recruited for the Temperance Movement after hearing an

oration given by John B. Gough in Bath. He became a total abstainer, and was ever ready to lend his powerful support to the work of the Church of England Temperance Society, the National Temperance League, the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union, and the Temperance Hospital. What he did for these organizations—and it was indeed much—was, however, as nothing in comparison with the extraordinary blessings which have accrued from his pastoral influence on the life of one distinguished woman—namely, Agnes Weston. In her own words, written on November 14 last, she says :

“No tribute from my pen could ever do justice to the debt of gratitude that I owe, under God, to dear Canon Fleming. About the year 1857, or 1858, when he was at All Saints' Church, Bath, I was a giddy, careless, schoolgirl, with no thought beyond the present, but his faithful and earnest preaching, by the power of God's Spirit, showed me my position, opened my eyes, and I realized that in God's sight I was undone indeed; the same teaching led me on to the acceptance of Christ as my Saviour, and little by little, as my life-work unrolled before me, I found in Canon Fleming a faithful and steadfast counsellor and friend. He always took a deep interest in my work among the blue-jackets, and when the Royal Sailors' Rests were built he became one of the trustees, which office he held until his death. I am sure that very many can say as much as I can, but few can say more. Under God I owe my life, and anything that has been done in it, to the faithful ministrations of the clergyman of my young days, Canon Fleming.”

In these days, when we hear much of the decay of the pulpit, and there is a tendency to cut down sermons, and to generally belittle the ordinance of preaching, an instance like this is very well worth keeping in mind.

Next to Fleming's influence upon Agnes Weston, we should certainly place the great stroke for philanthropy which he accomplished by championing the cause of Dr. Barnardo's Homes, and securing for that much-maligned worker the gracious patronage of Her Majesty and other members of the Royal Family.

The results of his powerful appeals on Hospital Sunday are well known. Preaching to his own people at St. Michael's, Chester Square, on Hospital Sunday, 1901, he said : “You are the premier givers ; you have raised £22,000 in twenty years. Nor is this all ; a generous member of this congregation has recently built, and furnished at a total cost of £23,000, a Convalescent Home for the benefit of the poor of St. Michael's Parish.”

We have no space to treat of his wonderful influence in the city of York, nor to give particulars of the touch which he had with many of the most famous people of the time. The reader will find in the “Life” much interesting information respecting notabilities, and some frank—rather too frank—criticisms of statesmen very much in the public eye. The book will once again establish that the man who chooses to be a parson and gives himself to his work can be no idler, and, further, that he has abounding opportunities of serving his brethren, rich and poor alike, not afforded by any other vocation in life.

