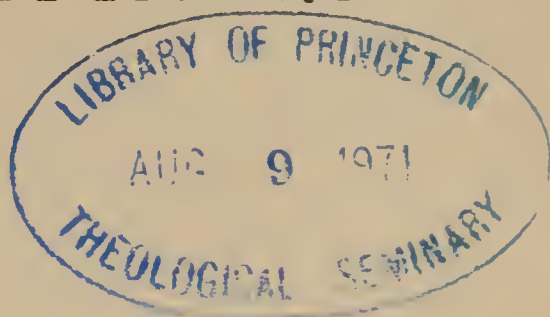


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CHAPTER XXX.

DR. GUTHRIE'S EARLY MINISTRY.

BY REV. JAMES McCOSH, D. D., LL.D.

His preaching had already the characteristic which afterwards made him so marked a man, and made him what I was accustomed to call him, "the pictorial preacher" of the age. I was told that when he was licensed to preach the gospel he preached like other people, (always preaching sound scriptural truth), but was not more popular than other people. Some years before I went to Arbroath he preached in the church of which I was afterwards minister, in order, it was understood, to receive a call, but the call did not come. When he became minister in Arberlot, *he began with preaching* after the *approved evangelical model* and delivered useful sermons. On the Sabbath afternoon he held an *exercise* for the young, and there he began to let out, at *first* timidly his *peculiar gifts*. He would tell such a *story* as this: "If a man suffers for doing a good deed, God in his providence may find means of recompensing him." When the great preacher Willison was about to remove from Brechin to Dundee, he was so obnoxious to the Jacobite Lords who ruled in the district, that he

could get no one for love nor money to convey his furniture. An ancestor of mine, a farmer in Kincaig, in the parish of Brechin, knowing him to be a great and good man, came forward boldly and lent him his horses to cart his goods without fee or reward.

Years rolled on, and in the year 1746, the Duke of Cumberland passed through the region in pursuit of Prince Charlie, and took away my forefathers horses. Wondering how he might get his property restored, he bethought him of his friend Willison, who wrote to the proper parties and got his horses returned. "Do what is right and kind, and you will be recompensed." The *dull eye* of the *plough boy* and the *servant girl* who had been toiling all the week among the horses and cows, *immediately brightened up as he spoke in this way*, and they were sure to go back next Sabbath, and take others with them. The farmer and his wife began to think that they might spend their Sabbath afternoons as pleasantly in this way as in any other, and went with their children and domestics to the meeting. They were not sure that he was a profound, scholarly preacher, like some of the men in the neighborhood who were made D. D.'s, by the colleges; but they were sure their new minister was a warm hearted man, and they were pleased to see him so attracting their sons and their daughters. He made it part of his *afternoon "exercise"* to *catechise the young people on the sermon they had heard in the forenoon*. "This," he was accustomed to say, "is a severe trial to a minister; it is sure to be so humbling, and yet he may profit much by it. How disappointed we feel when we find our *people remembering little or nothing of the passages we have written with such care.*"

It was thus I learned to preach. I noticed the parts that had not interested my audience and were not remembered, henceforth I avoided that style of preaching. I marked the passages that stuck in the minds of my young people, *and set about preaching so as to interest them.*" As he told me this shortly after my settlement in my first charge, I sought to profit by it, and came through an experience somewhat like his. I did not try to copy his graphic manner, but I endeavored to *preach so that everybody could understand me.* It should be added that his *unsurpassed power of illustration* was always employed to set forth the grand old cardinal truths of the Gospel.

His preparation for the pulpit was conscientiously careful. Possessed of a ready power of speech, he could have extemporized a sermon at any time, and thus saved himself much labor. But during all the years he was in Arberlot 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 Arberlot all his life, greatly esteemed in the district, but without occupying the wide sphere which God opened to him. Not that he kept slavishly to what he had written, being fully master of his subject, he felt himself *free to utter anything that occurred to him at the moment.* 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 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 understood by his audience.

He was already the most popular minister by far in the district, though as yet not much known beyond it. In all the surrounding country parishes, when he preached at the week-day services in connection with the dispensation of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the whole *people rushed to hear him*. In Arbroath, where he often preached on the Sabbath evenings after officiating at home during the day, *the churches were crowded to excess*, and you would have seen young men and women evidently moved, and old men and women *striving to conceal the tears that were running down their furrowed cheeks*. Some hard men thought that his discourses were not very logical; some finical men and women regarded his Forfarshire pronunciation as very broad, and his illustrations rather vivid; *they all went to hear him because their hearts were warmed*. And here I am tempted to remark that those critics have committed a great mistake who represent him as having no other quality than that of being able to move the feelings. Deeper down than even his power of exciting emotions by his pictures was a foundation of sound common sense with a profound knowledge of human nature, and his pathos was an efflorescence from this root. Some years after, Sir William Hamilton said to me quietly, "Your friend, Dr. Guthrie, is the *best preacher* I ever heard." I answered that I did not wonder at the opinion.