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PORTRAITS
OF
BRITISH AMERICANS,

BY
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PHOTOGRAPHER TO HER MAJESTY.

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

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THE

REVEREND WILLIAM LEITCH, D.D.,

LATE PRINCIPAL OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, KINGSTON.

IN the autumn of 1860 the writer was loitering on the deck of one of the Canadian steamships at Quebec, conversing with a lady whom on her arrival from England he had gone expressly to meet. Indicating by a gesture a gentleman of benevolent and clerical appearance, the lady remarked, "That is the Reverend Dr. Leitch, a Presbyterian Minister, who has lately been appointed to the office of Principal of Queen's College, Kingston." After a further observation or two, the lady, with some earnestness of manner, added, the Doctor was certainly "a very nice, and she felt sure must be a very good man, for he was kind in manner, cheerful in disposition, and apparently as happy as a Christian ought to be." Now we believe that the lady in question had not previously had the opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with any one in holy orders except the clergy of the Church of which she was a member. We also feel tolerably certain that until she heard the Reverend Doctor preach on board of the Steamship, she had never been present during the celebration of Divine Service elsewhere than in churches of her own communion. Moreover she had evidently been beset with the impression that Presbyterian divinity was of a sad and dreary type, cold in its temperature and unattractive in its

forms. She was apparently impressed with the notion that Presbyterian divines in harmony with her idea of their divinity were men of stern aspect, who, having missed the reflection of the Divine benignity, had only preserved the photograph of the Divine frown.

Now the Reverend Dr. Leitch in no respect corresponded to the Presbyterian type which her fancy had sketched. His manner was neither harsh nor stern. His appearance was neither knotty nor severe. Charity and courtesy seemed to abide with him, and their presence was as apparent in his conversation as it was conspicuous in his character. Nature moreover had been affluent in her gifts, for his appearance was irresistibly attractive. He looked not only like a good man, but he looked like a holy man. He carried his calling in his face; none would doubt his office who saw his countenance. Unalloyed happiness seemed to dwell there, as if it reflected the character of one whose soul, like the soul of the Psalmist, found its chief pleasure in blessing the Lord and remembering His benefits. Judging from his appearance only, Dr. Leitch might have been supposed to possess bodily health, as well as mental peace. There was nothing to inform the uninstructed eye of the extent to which the suffering body had been made subservient to the controlling mind; neither could one suspect that behind that vapor of spiritual radiance, bright with the peace of God, which, like an influence, seemed to surround his character there lay a load of misery which no physician could remove. Yet so it was: in his boyhood a serious fall had deranged his hip joint, and resulted in permanent lameness. In his manhood he was the subject of heart disease, which, after years of suffering and in the mid career of usefulness, terminated his valuable life.

The gifted author of the *Heir of Redclyffe* would probably have discovered in the subject of our sketch congenial elements for the creation of a hero, including the moral and physical qualities with which, with artistic cleverness, she succeeds in making affliction

glorious ; for she appears to possess a special relish for extracting moral perfection from personal defect, for making the bed of pain the forcing house of virtue, and for tracing spiritual excellence in manhood to a physical accident in youth. Other conditions being equal, an unhinged hip or an enlarged heart might, and certainly would, by that gifted gentlewoman, be made as available for poetic and dramatic uses, as a dilapidated spine or disordered lungs.

The authorities of Queen's College and the members of the Scotch Church generally congratulated themselves, and not without reason, on the gain which the causes of science and religion had received when, in answer to their earnest invitation, Dr. Leitch assumed the office of Principal. The regrets which followed his departure from home were only exceeded by the welcomes which awaited him on his arrival here. The laments of his countrymen in Scotland were answered by the rejoicings of his countrymen in Canada ; for while the former had difficulty in putting up with the loss, the latter had none in appropriating the gain.

To a conscientious man, and one moreover who possesses ability as well as taste for the work, the education of youth must be intensely attractive. Apart from the fact that the calling itself is and must necessarily be a sacred as well as an honorable one ; there is in it the flavor of immortality, a flavor more exhilarating than mere ephemeral fame, in the reflection that in some special department of the mint of knowledge, a process is going forward by which the teacher is reproducing in the pupil the coinage of his own thought, and creating, so to speak, from some unexplored vein of truth a sterling currency stamped with his own cherished opinions. Intellectual distinction as a mere personal quality would scarcely suffice to reconcile a teacher to his ill-requited work ; but when we associate with the accident of individual distinction, the creative power of generating and transmitting thought, we supply an incentive to work by bestowing upon the worker not only the solace of contemporary admiration, but the earnest of posthumous fame.

The late Principal was born in 1814 in the town of Rothsay, in the Island of Bute. He received the elements of instruction at the Parish school. At the age of fourteen, by falling from the mast of a yacht, he met with a serious accident, by which he fractured his hip joint. The accident resulted in painful and protracted confinement. For the period of eighteen months he was unable to leave the house, and when at length he did so, the distressing discovery was made that he was hopelessly lame for life. In the midst of dreariness and suffering he became an ardent and severe student, applying himself especially to those sciences which are based on mathematical truth. His education was subsequently continued at the grammar school of Greenock. At the age of eighteen he entered the University of Glasgow, where, in 1836, he graduated as a Master of Arts. During his arts course, as may readily be conjectured, those branches of knowledge which had attracted his boyhood were pursued with laudable industry and noteworthy success. He obtained the highest honors in the departments of mathematics, and the physical sciences, which his University could bestow. When a student he lectured on astronomy, and for several years he acted in the University observatory as assistant to the late Professor Nichol. He always cherished an ardent love for astronomical pursuits, and this love prompted him, when at Kingston, to promote with all the warmth of his character the usefulness of the observatory which had been established there. In connection with this subject we may mention that he published his carefully prepared work "God's Glory in the Heavens: or, Contributions to Astrotheology," a work which, at the time of its appearance, was, we are informed, most favorably noticed by the ablest reviewers. We may add that when a student at Glasgow he was also a lecturer in mathematics in the Andersonian Institution of that city.

In 1838 he was licensed as a preacher of the Church of Scotland by the Presbytery of Dunoon. In 1839 he was appointed assistant

minister of the Parish of Arbroath; and in 1841 he received a similar appointment to the Parish of Kirkden, in the Presbytery of Forfar. In the memorable year of 1843 he was, by the Earl of Leven and Melville, presented to the Parish of Monimail, where, after the usual forms, he was ordained by the Presbytery of the bounds of Cupar in Fife. Of this parish he continued to be a minister until the year 1859, when he was selected by the Reverend Dr. Barclay, and Alexander Morris, Esq., the present member of the Legislative Assembly for the County of South Lanark, from a list of many names, for the high office of Principal of the University of Queen's College, Kingston. The deputation were complimented, and with good reason, on the choice they had made; for the gentleman chosen was well known in his native country not only as a man of science, a ripe scholar, and an earnest minister of the Scotch Church, but for the active part he had taken in the controversies of the time. As Convener of the Committee of the General Assembly on Sunday Schools he was brought into contact personally, or by correspondence, with all the ministers of his Church. Thus were his clerical brethren made cognizant of his wise and zealous management of the machinery by which the work of sacred education was controlled. When his departure from Scotland was determined on, the tide of regret rose, and, shaping itself in the tones of entreaty, he was besought by many, who loved and admired him, to reconsider the step he was about to take, and, if not too late, to give to the Church of his country the benefit of those talents which were then consecrated to the service of his Church in Canada.

During his residence in Scotland his devout mind had reverently reflected on the union which exists between science and religion, a union which modern unbelief seeks assiduously to dissolve. Knowing to what extent human thought is influenced by the periodical literature of the day, he became a diligent contributor

among other works, to *Kitto's Journal of Sacred Literature*, *McPhail's Magazine*, *The Edinburgh Christian Magazine*, *The Scottish Quarterly Review*, and *Good Words*. Besides works such as these, wherein he is said to have discussed with singular clearness many of the most important theological questions of the day, he was the author of certain articles on the miracles of our Lord, in which he controverted the opinions of the late Reverend and learned Dr. Wardlaw on that subject. Thus the question of miracles, as discussed in modern times, had received from him much anxious study,—so much, that at the time of his death he had, we believe, in preparation, if not ready for the press, a work on the subject of a very exhaustive character. Whether such skilled labor will ever see the light, we cannot say. Perhaps, like other fragments of scattered or ungathered thought, it is destined to lie unnoticed for a time to be reverently garnered after “many days.”

On leaving Scotland, his Alma Mater conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. The act was complimentary to the individual as well as to the institution over which he had been selected to preside. Thus laden with the honors of his College, and with the good wishes, as well as with the regrets of his countrymen, the learned Doctor arrived in Canada. Little time elapsed before he was formally installed in his new office; for on the 8th November, 1860, he took the chair as Principal of the University of Queen's College. The welcome extended to him by trustees, professors, and students was of the most cordial kind, and the friends of the College in congratulating him, congratulated one another also, on the satisfactory fact, that by the addition of the Principal, the new staff of Professors was rendered thoroughly complete. The inaugural address was described as “most able, eloquent and interesting;” and we can easily believe the appended information that its passages of eloquence were rapturously acknowledged by spontaneous and irrepressible cheers.

By an ecclesiastical law, Dr. Leitch, as Principal of the University, was entitled to a seat in the Presbytery of Kingston as well as in the Synod of the Scotch Church in Canada. It occasioned no surprise, therefore, when the latter met at Toronto, in the year 1862, that he was unanimously elected Moderator. In virtue of his office in Queen's College, he had a seat in the Senatus of the University of Toronto, of which University he was subsequently appointed an Examiner.

It was about this time that the attention of Principal Leitch was especially directed to the subject of University education in Canada, with particular reference to what he considered to be the unfair monopoly of privilege and revenue on the part of the University of Toronto. Our space will not permit us to refer to his plans of amelioration and amendment, much less to enquire whether they were beneficial or the reverse. Unquestionably they possessed certain features which, from a popular stand point, were highly attractive, for they included, we believe, some sort of scheme of decentralization, by which Collegiate education should be carried to the various sections of the country, instead of being accumulated at one great centre. While however he was giving his thoughts to the general question of University education in Canada, there arose in the very heart of the College, of which he was the Principal, some irritating and vexatious subjects of dispute; which were aggravated by the circumstance that they were not free from personal animosity. Into the merits of those disputes, we have neither space nor inclination to enquire. That they embittered the latter days of the subject of our sketch, there can be no doubt; neither can there be any doubt that before the shadows fell upon his intellect, and the powers of darkness overtook his life, all disquieting remembrances had been laid at rest, all offences done to him by others had been forgiven. He died as a Christian man ought to die, with faith towards God and in peace and

charity with all mankind. In the quaint and reverent words of his pious countryman, Farley, we not inappropriately conclude our sketch :

My light from whence it came, mounts still on high
Unto the source of light that's never dry,
Like as the rivers to the Ocean run,
From whence their secret fountains first begun ;
Like as the stone doth to the centre sway,
So to the spheres my light still makes his way.
No joys, delights, and greatest weights of gold,
Nor pampering pleasure fast our souls can hold.
The panting soul rests not, until it see
His maker God, a Tri-une Deity.