

HUGH BINNING.

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AMONG those who adorned the Church of Christ in this world there were many whose work was finished at an age when the greater number of its most useful members were only beginning their life's work. Of these there does not seem to be a more outstanding instance than Mr. Hugh Binning, who exercised his ministry for a brief period in Govan.

Mr. Binning, who was born in the year 1627 and died in the twenty-sixth year of his age, was the son of John Binning, the proprietor of a large estate in Ayrshire. His mother's name was Margaret McKell, a sister of Mr. Hugh McKell, one of ministers of Edinburgh. Though of a weak constitution he, from his infancy, gave many tokens that he was one whom the Lord had endowed with more than ordinary intelligence, and from a very early age gave very clear proofs that that intelligence was sanctified by grace. His father, being in easy circumstances, was able to give Hugh a liberal education, and the latter made the most of this advantage. In the grammar school he made great proficiency in Latin so that he was far in advance of those who were many years his senior.

Where such advantages and talents go hand in hand one often has the painful experience of seeing those who possess them being ruined by pride so that their usefulness is marred, and in too many cases ruined altogether. Such was not the case with the subject of this sketch. For him there was only one end in acquiring education and that was to make him more fit to serve Christ. With his natural endowments he could make his mark in any company but there was only one fellowship in this world which he desired, and he learned that it could only be obtained by maintaining a close walk with God. This led him away from the company of worldings to the sober and soul-edifying company of God's people, and so ripe was he in Christian experience at the early age of fourteen years that it is recorded that those who were aged and experienced Christians acknowledged that they were much edified by his company.

Before he was fourteen years of age he entered Glasgow University and took a high place in all the classes which he attended, especially the Moral Philosophy

class, where he outstripped his fellow students as he did before in the study of Latin in the grammar school. After graduating Master of Arts, according to one biographer, "with great applause," he began the study of Divinity, in which branch of his preparation for the ministry he acquitted himself with great credit. At the time he began his Divinity studies the Chair of philosophy in the University became vacant and Mr, Binning was prevailed upon with great difficulty to compete for that post. There were other two competitors who had influence with some of the members of the Senatus, but Binning acquitted himself in all the parts of the trial so well that the other two had not the least chance. Their sponsors then pleaded as an obstacle Mr. Binning's youth and the likelihood of consequent inexperience, but in the end they gave way, when it was suggested that a further trial should be prescribed to the candidates, and Mr. Binning was elected. This happened in the nineteenth year of his age.

The young Professor entered upon his new duties combining the ardour of youth with a judgment, which for its maturity was most uncommon for one of his years, he had a memory which seemed to retain everything he ever heard or read, and out of that treasure-house he was enabled to bring out, apparently at will, what shed light on every subject with which he dealt.

Together with this he possessed an extraordinary power of discrimination by which he was enabled to separate the precious from the vile so that during the three years he continued as Professor of Philosophy he was known as a burning and shining light in that branch of learning. According to one biographer, he is credited with being the first in Scotland to reform Philosophy "from the barbarous terms and unintelligible distinctions of the schoolmen, and the many vain disputes and trifling subtleties, which rather perplexed the minds of the youth, than furnished them with solid and useful knowledge." His attainments in this direction are all the more remarkable when one considers that during his term as Professor of Moral Philosophy, he attended the divinity classes and passed his trials for licence with more than ordinary credit.

Soon after being licensed to preach the gospel by the Presbytery of Glasgow, he became minister of Govan when only twenty-two years of age. Though, as has been noticed already, from his youth experienced Christians acknowledged that they were much edified and comforted in his company, yet, he himself was much

afflicted with doubts as to his personal interest in Christ which caused him to be without solid comfort. This occasioned backwardness in publicly performing religious duties. However, a short while before he entered upon his public ministry a change came over him, though in some aspects of it different from the change that came over Dr. MacDonald of Ferintosh during his ministry in Edinburgh, yet in other aspects of it very similar to it. Dr. Kennedy in his life of the "Apostle of the North," says, "There have been instances of persons becoming other men who were never new creatures in Christ; but there have been also instances of renewed men becoming other men under a fresh baptism of the Spirit." Among these may be classed the change that had come over Hugh Binning. A great calm settled upon his spirit and he was never afterwards known to refuse an invitation to preach, no matter how exalted the profession or station of those in the audience might be. To this changed attitude he himself gave the following explanation:

"When I have a clear call to mention my blessed Master's name in any place, I have no more to say, but 'Here I am, send me.' What am I that I should resist His heavenly call? And when He whose name is holy and reverend is spoken of and to, and is there present, the presence of no other person is to be regarded or dreaded, and under that impression, I forget who is present and who is absent." How like the spirit that animated God's ambassadors of old, who cared not for the face of man.

After he became minister of Govan, he married Barbara Simpson, a daughter of the Rev. James Simpson, a minister in Ireland. How thoroughly consecrated to his Master's service, and how much his affections were set on things above are brought out by the fact that on the day he was getting married, after arriving in the parish where the ceremony was to be performed, he accepted an invitation to preach, and though the invitation was not expected, he immediately stepped aside to meditate for a short while, and pray for his Master's presence. He then entered the pulpit and preached with great power from 1. Peter i. 15: "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation."

During his brief ministry the unhappy division between the Resolutioners and Protestors took place in the Church of Scotland. Suffice it to say here of that division, that the Church of Scotland, through it, receive many wounds of which

she was not the better for many a long year. Binning's burning zeal for the glory of God and the cause of Christ, made him deplore divisions in the Church, yet that very zeal caused him to cast in his lot with the Protestors. Still, he recognised that his mission in life was not to create divisions, but to bring about unity where that could be done on a Scriptural foundation. With that end in view he wrote an excellent Treatise on Christian Love

After a faithful and successful ministry of only four years, God, who gave him as a bright and shining light to the Church in Scotland, removed him in the twenty-sixth year of his age from the church militant to the church triumphant, there to shine infinitely brighter in that light where there is no darkness. He left behind him a widow and one son. His biographer says of him: "He was a person of singular piety, of a humble, meek and peaceable temper, a judicious and lively preacher; nay, so extraordinary a person, that he was justly accounted a prodigy for the pregnancy of his natural parts, and his great proficiency in human learning, and knowledge of divinity. He was too shining a light to shine long, and burned so intensely, that he was soon put out; but now shines in the kingdom of his Father, in a more conspicuous and refulgent manner, even as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever."

Though his ministry was short his writing abundantly testify to his gifts and graces, and show him to have been a sweet preacher of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides several sermons on different texts, we have in his published works, a series of forty sermons on Romans viii. 1-15, and a series of twenty-eight sermons on the first epistle of John, chapters i. and ii. The subject he deals with is "Fellowship with God." He began a series of sermons on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, which if he had lived to finish would have made an excellent Body of Divinity. He, however, reached only as far as the question, "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?" and left this world to know the answer to that question as none can know it on earth. So edifying were these sermons to the Lord's people at home and abroad, that besides several impressions of them being printed in this country, they were, many years ago, translated into Dutch. All his writings prove him to have been "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."-J. C.