



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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John Livingstone, M.A. (1630-1635)¹

Minister Of Killinchy.

by Thomas Witherow

[From his book *Historical and Literary Memorials of Presbyterianism in Ireland.*]

A Brief Historical Relation of the Life of Mr. John Livingtone, Minister of the Gospel, containing several observations of the Divine Goodness manifested to him in several occurrences thereof. Written by himself [in 1666] during his banishment in Holland for the cause of Christ. [Printed at Glasgow, 1754; republished, Glasgow, 1773.]

2. *Memorable Characteristics, and Remarkable Passages of Divine Providence, exemplified in the Lives of some of the most eminent Ministers and Professors in the Church of Scotland. [Written in 1668.]*

S. *Letters on Public Events [1641-1671]: Substance of a Discourse at Ancrum, 13th of October, 1662: Sayings and Observations.*

[All the above are contained in *Select Biographies of the Wodrow Society.*—M.C.D.]

John Livingstone, was born on the 21st June, 1603, at Kilsyth in Stirlingshire, where his father was minister. His grandfather, the Rev. Alexander Livingstone, was grandson of the fifth Lord Livingstone, the guardian of Queen Mary Stuart. He was thus the third of the family, who in succession had been a minister of the Church of Scotland. Having received his school education in Stirling, he entered the University of Glasgow, where he had Robert Blair, afterwards of Bangor, for his instructor in logic and metaphysics, and where he graduated in 1621. He could not remember in after years the time, place, or circumstances in which the Lord first wrought upon his heart, but he was admitted to the Lord's table before he left school for college in 1617. At first he was uncertain as to what profession he should enter, but in the end decided for the ministry, and commenced to preach in 1625. In the parish of Torphichen, both patron and people were anxious for his settlement among them, but his nonconformity to the prelatie ceremonies was too well known to make him acceptable to Spottiswoode, Archbishop of St. Andrews, and difficulties were thrown in the way, which disappointed the wishes of the congregation. For two years afterwards he acted as chaplain to the Earl of Wigtown, and preached in various places over the country as he found opportunity. A, sermon which be

¹ The years of his ministry in Ireland.

preached at the kirk of Shotts on a communion Monday, 21st June, 1630, is said to have been blessed to as many as five hundred souls. During this period, several parishes presented him with calls, but the bishops regarded him as an enemy, and constantly succeeded in preventing his settlement.

In 1630, letters from Lord Claneboy called him to Ireland. He accepted the invitation, and on the 29th August received ordination from Andrew Knox, the old bishop of Raphoe, who as a presbyter joined several ministers in conferring on him Presbyterian orders, as already mentioned in the case of Blair, and “who thought his old age was prolonged for little other purpose but to do such offices.” The avowed design of the bishop in this act was to obviate Livingstone’s scruples as to the Scriptural validity of prelatical orders. Bishop Echlin does not seem to have been satisfied about his going for ordination to Bishop Knox, still he did not raise any objection to his settlement at Killinchy, from which parish he had received a unanimous call. His ministry in that district was very successful, and many received through his means deep religious impressions. His intercourse with other ministers of principles similar to his own was very pleasant. A considerable number of them had by this time settled around the shores of Belfast Lough, and the monthly meeting, which had its origin in the religious movement pervading the district of the Six Mile Water, gave them frequent opportunities for religious and friendly intercourse. In this meeting Livingstone took an active part.

He had been scarcely a year at Killinchy till, in common with Blair of Bangor, his friend and neighbour, he was suspended by Bishop Echlin for nonconformity, and for “stirring up the people to extacies and enthusiasms.” For a little the censure was relaxed through the interference of the Primate; but on the 4th of May, 1632, the bishop proceeded to depose Blair and Livingstone, and eight days afterwards Dunbar of Larne and Welsh of Templepatrick. The king when appealed to would have given redress, but his good intentions were frustrated through the influence of his advisers, Laud and Wentworth, who were at the time the virtual rulers both of king and kingdom. The two years from May, 1632, till May, 1634, Livingstone spent in Scotland, preaching as he had opportunity, but occasionally visiting Ireland, and holding among his people secret meetings for worship. At Killinchy his salary was never over £40 a year; but such was the liberality of friends in Scotland, that he never wanted money for the supply of necessaries, or to defray the cost of his frequent journeys. In old age he could not remember that he ever had occasion to borrow money except once, when he had the use of five or six pounds for a short time from a friend in Ireland.

In May, 1634, a letter from Lord Deputy Wentworth restored the deposed ministers. In November of that year, Blair was finally deposed and excommunicated; but for some reason now unknown there was no interference

with Livingstone for a year after. During that interval of quiet he married Miss Fleming, sister's daughter of Beatrix Hamilton, the first Mrs. Blair, who then resided with her mother and her stepfather at Malone, near Belfast. The wedding came off in the West Church of Edinburgh, in June, 1635; and in the short interval between his marriage and his deposition he dwelt with his wife and her mother at Malone, whence from time to time he went down to preach at Killinchy. Echlin died on the 17th July, 1635, but his successor, Henry Leslie, who was consecrated on the 4th October following, was more rigorous than he. The month after his consecration (November, 1635), he deposed Livingstone, and followed up the sentence with excommunication. In these dark days, Mr. Blair, on whom the prelatical anathema had first fallen, came with his young wife, Catherine Montgomery, and lived with his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson, at the Iron Furnace, Malone. The two ministers, while there, often conducted private meetings for worship; and while the Eaglewing was in building down at Groomsport to carry them out of the country, they spent one day every week in fasting and prayer for a blessing on the undertaking.

Livingstone and his wife shared with Blair in the perils of the unfortunate voyage already described, and on returning from it he dwelt at Malone throughout the winter of 1636-7. Then to escape imprisonment for preaching in private after his deposition, he passed over to Scotland, where he was settled as minister of Stranraer. There, upon the opposite side of the Channel, he was often visited by old hearers from Killinchy. As many, it is said, as five hundred would sail over to attend his communion at Stranraer; on one occasion he baptized twenty-eight children, brought over for that purpose, from the County Down; while some removed their residence to the neighbourhood where he lived, rather than forego the advantage of his ministry.

At different times between 1642 and 1648, he was sent by the General Assembly to preach in those districts of Down and Antrim, which the great Irish Rebellion of 1641 had left entirely destitute of religious instruction in any form. During these brief periodical visits he travelled from place to place, preaching once every weekday and twice on the Sabbath. His last visit to Ireland was for nine or ten weeks in 1656, at which time a considerable number of ministers had settled permanently in the country. Twenty-one years of prelatical rule and Irish rebellion and army oppression, had produced great changes. Death also had not been idle. In the district with which he was best acquainted, he did not then find, more than nine or ten persons whom he had once known when minister of Killinchy.

During the great civil war, he was sent as chaplain along with a regiment in the Scottish army, when it marched into England. In 1648, he removed from

Stranraer to be minister of Ancrum; and two years after he accompanied the commission appointed by the Parliament of Scotland to treat with Charles II., then in exile at Breda. The result of this journey was to convince himself, that he was not qualified to shine either as a statesman or a diplomatist.

After the Restoration, Livingstone was called before the authorities, and when he refused to take an oath of allegiance, according to, the terms of which he was to acknowledge the king to be the supreme governor in all cases, civil and ecclesiastical—which he understood to mean that he was to recant the Covenant, and admit as lawful the introduction of Prelacy—he was banished from the kingdom. He arrived in Rotterdam in April, 1663, and in the December of the same year he was joined by his wife. His last years were spent in private studies and in peace. He died at Rotterdam, on the 9th of May, 1672.

Livingstone was short-sighted: in constitution he was moderately strong; in temperament, timorous and yielding. He was the most popular and successful Scottish preacher of, his age. His custom was to make out abort notes for his preaching, and to enlarge upon them at the time. of delivery. To have his heart in tune he found to be the best preparation, and to know that the people were hungering for instruction was his greatest aid. He never preached a sermon, he was accustomed to say, which he would care to see in writing, except two; one of which was that preached on a communion Monday at the kirk of Shotts, the other on a similar occasion at Holywood. Had he lived in quieter times, it is probable he would have made for himself a name in literature; as it was, he attained considerable proficiency in the department of ancient and modern languages.

The *Letters*, and fragments of *Sermons*, of which he is the author, are not of much importance. His Autobiography, or *Brief Historical Relation*, is very like that of Blair, his teacher and friend, and is of equal value as an illustration from an independent source of the early history of Presbyterianism in Ireland. It covers the whole period of his life from his birth to his exile, and is intensely interesting, not only from the manner in which it touches upon the public events of this time, but from the candid and honest way in which he describes himself. The *Memorable Characteristics* is a short record of the history and character of various eminent Christians in Scotland and Ireland, many of whom he had personally known. In it he preserves various facts of, interest and personal traits, in regard to several individuals which otherwise would have been lost. The *Brief Historical Relation* was printed in a quarto form in 1727, and has passed through several editions. The only complete edition of the writings of Livingstone is that contained in the *Select Biographies* of the Wodrow Society. Some of the descendants of Livingstone emigrated to the New England Colonies. His great-grandson, Philip Livingstone, was speaker in the House of Assembly, and one of the fifty-six who signed the

declaration of American Independence. Another of his great-grandsons was Judge Livingstone, father of the Chancellor, who administered the oath of office to General Washington. [Livingstone's *Works in Select Biographies of the Wodrow Society*, vol. i.; Reid's *History*; Hunt's *Life of Edward Livingstone*, New York, 1864.]

Kneeling At The Communion.

I was from my infancy bred with averseness from Episcopacy and ceremonies. While I was in the College at Glasgow, in the year 1619 or 1620, being, as I think, the first year that kneeling at the communion was brought in there, I, being with Some two or three of the young men of the college, set down among the people at the table, and Mr. James Law, the pretended bishop of Glasgow, coming to celebrate the communion, he urged all the people to fall down and kneel. Some did so: we sat still. He came to us, commanding us to kneel, or to depart. Somewhat I spoke to him, but do not perfectly remember what I said. It was to this purpose, that there was no warrant for kneeling, and for want of it we ought not to be excommunicated from the table of the Lord. He caused some of the people about us to rise, that we might remove; which we did.—*Historical Relation*, Period I.

Courtship In The Old Times.

In June, 1635, the Lord was graciously pleased to bless me with my wife, who how well accomplished in every way, and how faithful an yoke-fellow, I desire to leave to the memory of others. She was the eldest daughter of Bartholomew Fleming, merchant in Edinburgh. . . . Her father died at London in 1624, and was laid hard by Mr. John Welsh, and these two only of a long time had been buried without the Service Book. . . . Her mother, with her second husband, John Stevenson, and her family, came to Ireland in the end of the year 1633. When I went a visit to Ireland in the year 1634, Mr. Blair proposed to me that marriage. Immediately thereafter I was sent to London to have gone to New England, and returned the June following. I had Seen her before several times in Scotland, and heard the testimony of many of her gracious disposition; yet I was for nine months seeking as I could direction from God anent that business, during which time I did not offer to speak to her (who I believe had not heard anything of the matter), only for want of clearness in my mind, although I was twice or thrice in the house, and Saw her frequently at communion and public meetings. And it is like I might have been longer in that darkness, except the Lord had presented an occasion of our conferring together. For in November, 1634, when I was going to the Friday meeting at Antrim, I forgathered with her and some other going thither, and proponed to them by the way to confer upon a text, whereon I was to preach the day after at Antrim; wherein I found her conference so judicious and spiritual, that I took that for some answer of my prayer to have *lay* mind cleared, and blamed myself that I had not before taken occasion to confer with her. Four or five days thereafter proponed the matter to her, and desired her to think upon it; and after a week or two I went to her mother's house, and being alone with her, desiring her answer, I went to prayer, and urged her to pray, which at last she did; and in that time I got abundant clearness that it was the Lord's mind I should marry her. I then proponed the matter more fully to her mother: and albeit I was thus fully cleared, I may truly say it was close a month after before I got marriage affection to her, although she was for personal endowments beyond many of her equals; and I got it not till I obtained it by prayer. But thereafter I had greater difficulty to moderate it.—*Historical Relation*, Period III.

Parting Advice To His Congregation.

In the meantime love and help one another; have a care to breed your children to know the Lord, and to keep themselves from the pollutions of an evil world. I recommend to you above all books, except the blessed Word of God, the Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism. Be grounding yourselves, and one another, against the abominations of Popery, in case it should prove the trouble of the time, as I apprehend it may. Let a care be had of the poor and sick; there is left as much in the ordinary way as will suffice for meat and money for a year or more. I cannot insist on the several particulars, wherein possibly you would crave advice. The Word is a lamp, and the Spirit of Christ will guide into all truth. The light that comes after unfeigned humiliation, and self-denial, and earnest prayer, and search of the Scripture, is a sure light.—*Letter to the People of Ancrum*, dated 3rd April, 1663.

Message Sent Them From Rotterdam.

In all things, and above all things, let the Word of God be your only rule, Christ Jesus your only hope, His Spirit your only guide, and His glory your only end. See that each of you apart worship God every day, morning and evening at least: read some of His Word, and call on Him by prayer, and give Him thanks. If ye be straitened with business, it is not so much the length of your prayer that He regards, as the uprightness and the earnestness of the heart; but neglect not the duty; and if ye be without the hearing of others, utter your voice; it is sometime a great help, but do it not to be heard of others. Sing also a psalm or some part of a psalm: ye may learn some by heart for that purpose. Through the whole day, labour to set the Lord always before you, as present to observe you and strengthen you for every duty, and then look over how the day hath been spent before you sleep. Such as have families, set up the worship of God in your families, as ye would avoid the wrath that shall be poured on the families that call not on His name. As occasion offers of any honest minister coming amongst you, neglect not the same: and on the Lord's-day go where ye can hear the Word sincerely preached by a sent minister . . . but I dare not bid you hear any of the intruded hirelings, whom they call curates. —*Letter to the People of Ancrum*, dated 7th Oct., 1671.

Death-Bed Remarks.

I die in the faith that the truths of God, which He hath helped the Church of Scotland to own, shall be owned by Him as truths so long as sun and moon endure. I hate Independency, though there be good men among them, and some well-meaning people favour it: yet it will be found more to the prejudice of the work of God than many are aware, for they vanish into vain opinions.

I have had my own faults, as other men, but He made me always to abhor *shows*.

I cannot say much of great services; yet if ever my heart was lifted up, it was in preaching Jesus Christ.

His Attainments.

Had I in a right manner behaved and taken pains, it had been better for myself and others; but a lazy trusting to assistance in the meantime kept me barehanded all my days. I had a kind of coveting, when I got leisure and opportunity, to read much, and of different subjects; and I was oft challenged that my way of reading was like some men's lust after such a kind of play and recreation. I used to read much too fast, and so was somewhat pleased in the time, but retained little. My memory was somewhat waterish and weak, yet had I improved it I might have had better

use of it; for after I came from college I did with no great difficulty attain to some tolerable insight in the Hebrew and Chaldee and somewhat also of the Syriac. The Arabic I did essay, but the vastness of it made me give it over. I got also so much of the French, the Italian, and after that of the Low Dutch, that I could make use of sundry of their books; and of the Spanish and High Dutch, that I could make use of their Bibles. It was once or twice laid on me by the General Assembly to write the History of the Church of Scotland since the late Reformation, 1638; but, beside my inability for such. an under taking, and my lazy disposition, I could by no means procure the materials fit for such a work. -*Historical Relation*, Period V.

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