

Fletcher of Madeley

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Fletcher of Madeley.

Two hundred years ago there was born on the banks of the Lake of Geneva, Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère, who, though a Swiss, was destined to become a clergyman of the Church of England, take part in the shaping of early Methodism, and create as "Fletcher of Madeley" a tradition of saintliness which has been cherished by many English evangelicals for the past hundred and fifty years. The effeminate appearance which his portraits suggest had no existence in fact; for he was an athletic youth, and served for some years as a young officer in the Dutch army, until the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle brought his soldiering to an end.

After a period of travel he came to England as a student teacher, and finally settled with a well-known Shropshire family, near Shrewsbury, as tutor to their two sons. While there his religious life deepened and he became interested in Methodism. At the termination of his engagement with the Hills, at Attingham Hall, and largely through their influence, he received ordination at the hands of two bishops, and was appointed to the small rural parish of Durham, in Cheshire, a post which he promptly exchanged for Madeley, a little town which was then the centre of the Shropshire coal and iron trade.

Whitefield and Wesley were then abroad in the land, religious revival was in the air, and Fletcher's preaching, which was similar to Wesley's in scholarship and fervour, soon attracted more hearers than the parish church could accommodate, and wrought such a change in the habits and morals of the industrial population of the country as to appear miraculous. Wesley urged that "such a burning and shining light should not be kept under a bushel," and the strenuous Methodist leader persuaded Fletcher to undertake an itinerary of about a thousand miles. The effort of preaching day after day nearly killed him. The Countess of Huntingdon, an outstanding personality of the Whitefield branch of Methodism, had appointed Fletcher one of her chaplains earlier in his career, and when she established her Seminary for preachers at Trevecca, in South Wales—perpetuated in Cheshunt College, Cambridge—she induced him to accept the honorary presidency. He held this post until the Calvinist-Arminian controversy became acute, and he found it impossible to continue.

After Whitefield's death, it will be remembered, Wesley deemed it necessary to repudiate the fatalistic and antimomian tendencies of Calvinism, and the disparagement of "good works" which he thought was common; and Fletcher, who as a youth had turned away from a proposal that he should enter the Swiss Protestant Church because he "would be under the necessity of subscribing to the Doctrine of Predestination," took sides with him, and supported him by writing various pamphlets. But as Southey said, "not even theological controversy could disturb his serene and heavenly temper."

Fletcher's positive contribution to the Wesleyan Methodist movement may be said to be his emphasis on what afterwards was known as "the Doctrine of Christian Holiness." In one of his most characteristic letters to Wesley he wrote, "If only we could bring our preachers, itinerant and local, uniformly and steadily to insist on two points, 'Christ dying for us' and 'Christ reigning in us,' we should shake the gates of hell." According to Tyerman, the Methodist historian, Wesley thought of Fletcher as his successor; but at fifty-six years of age and long before Wesley had finished his work, the ardent spirit of the Vicar of Madeley had fled. The vicarage he occupied remains, but the old church in which he ministered was replaced by a new building many years ago. There, under succeeding incumbents, the old traditions of broad-minded evangelicalism are still successfully maintained.

The memory of Fletcher of Madeley is honoured in all the churches to-day. There are many who look confidently for a resurgence of vitality in modern Christianity along the lines of the practical mysticism, the same saintliness, which Fletcher's life so beautifully illustrated.

In Switzerland and in Germany Bishop Nuelson has been preparing for a worthy celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of "Fletcher of Madeley" by lecturing on his life and work, which he has described in a book. *Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère* (John William Fletcher), Der erste Schweizerische Methodist. Von Bischof D. Dr. John L. Nuelson. (Zürich: Christliche Vereinsbuchhandlung. Fr. 2.50.)

—The Christian World.

Swiss Alpine Heroes.

At Zermatt behind the garden of the Hotel Cervin there is hidden a little museum which is better worth a visit than many of the more pretentious museums in large cities. Here are many evidences of the adventurous spirit of man determined to conquer nature, and also, alas! the poignant witness of the price that has been paid in the process. There, in a glass case, for example, you see a piece of the rope which snapped on the day when Whymper and his party stood for the first time in the history of man on the top of the Matterhorn. Coming down one of the party slipped and plunged four of them into the abyss, leaving the two Taugwalders and Whymper holding on for grim life, and horror-stricken at the catastrophe. Close by, in the same case, is the hat of Michel Croz, the other guide who paid, with his life, the price of this great adventure, and the prayer-book of the Rev. C. Hudson, who also was one of those killed.

The story is one of the epics of Alpine climbing and hundreds of visitors find their way to the little cemetery to see the memorial to Lord Francis Douglas and his companions in misfortune.

The museum is full of interesting relics which all have their own story to tell; a story that thrills the heart and warms the blood. Immediately inside the door there is a picture which arrests the eye of the visitor as he reads its history. It causes him to ponder over the wondrous endurance and magnificent courage of those mountain lovers who have risked life and limb in order that they might conquer those great snow-clad heights. A descriptive note informs us how, on Friday, July 27, 1900, a little party successfully climbed the Matterhorn, and were returning to Zermatt when not far from the Hörnli Ridge, a young Englishman, Mr. A. G. H. Sloggett, with his two guides, Aguste Gentenitta and Alphonse Furrier were swept off their feet by an avalanche of stones and rocks. Furrier was killed on the spot, and the three roped together were precipitated down a wall of ice into a crevasse, 900 feet below. Gentenitta, although severely injured, showed magnificent courage and presence of mind, and succeeded first in rescuing Mr. Sloggett who was on the point of suffocation, he having fallen head downward; then, in helping him to climb the ice wall without axes.

Those two men performed the almost incredible feat considering that Mr. Sloggett was suffering from concussion and a broken jaw, and other injuries. On reaching the track in a very exhausted condition, they were fortunately discovered and rescued. This, even to-day is considered one of the greatest and most remarkable escapes in the history of mountaineering. Surely here is the germ of a glorious story, and one well worth the attention of some great novelist! There are many fine portraits in the museum; one of Leslie Stephen arrests the attention of a visitor directly he enters, by its wonderful fineness of expression and the stamp of unmistakable genius which is upon it. Whymper's portrait is also here, and reveals the countenance of a dogged, determined man, who would go through fire and water to accomplish his purposes, and who had struck the word "impossible" out of his dictionary. But a visit to the museum is best worth making because of the opportunity it gives for a chat with the curator; a man who is more wonderful than any of his exhibits.

This is Rudolph Taugwalder. He is a maimed hero lacking a foot and a hand, the price he has paid for his adventurous spirit. A fine open countenance, typically Swiss, with a pleasant smile of welcome for every visitor; modest about his own achievements, yet warming as he tells the story of other heroes whom he has known he is better worth knowing than many who have made for themselves distinguished names on the battlefield.

For twenty years he was one of the noted guides of the Alps, and has climbed the Matterhorn no less than twenty-eight times. He was the intimate of Whymper and Tyndall and many other great men whose achievements have passed into history, and has interesting reminiscences sufficient to fill a large volume. His face lights up and his eyes sparkle as you draw from him the story of some glorious climb, but there is not the slightest tinge of egotism in anything he says. The thing of which he is proud is, that in all his experiences as a guide, he never lost a man.

There is no height around Zermatt that he has not climbed; no peak that was too much for his venturesome spirit to attempt. Monte Rosa,

the Lyscam, and all the other great heights: he has looked down upon his native village from them all. But the spirit of adventure led him farther afield than Zermatt and even Switzerland was not sufficient to satisfy his ambition. He has climbed in Russia and has stood on the top of Mount Ararat where Noah's Ark rested. He has scaled what seems to be inaccessible heights in the Himalayas. Then tragedy overtook him when he, with two others made a first ascent of Mount Huescaran in America, reaching the tremendous height of 21,800 feet. He and his party were caught in a blinding snowstorm, and for two days and a night tried to fight their way to safety. The cold was so intense that as a result of frost bite, he lost a foot and two fingers, and so was compelled to return home, a crippled hero of forty-two. Now he lives in the memory of great climbs of the past, and finds a mission in encouraging younger men to do and dare. I asked him which of his many climbs he considered to be his greatest achievement, and his reply was that it was at Chamounix, when he climbed one of the needle heights in the vicinity of Mont Blanc.

It is almost with tears that he tells you how the adventures of others stir the old longing within him, and how, deep down in his soul, he hears the call of the mighty mountains. As he talks of these and other things, our eyes fall upon the picture of his grandfather, the Taugwalder of Whymper's story. He is surrounded by the photographs of the most famous guides; Michael Fellenbrugh, Anderegg, Pottinger, and many another whose heroic deeds are told in many a Chalet around the winter's stove, but his face is as distinctive in its outstanding characteristics as the Matterhorn is among the great mountains of Switzerland. One glance at its strong outlines tells you that he is a man, who, to use the words of Wesley's hymn, "laughed at impossibilities" who never knew what fear was—hard as granite—true as steel—as gentle as a child, and as faithful as the dogs of St. Bernard. There is a world of kindly feeling in those deep-set eyes of his; a man to whom you would unhesitatingly trust your life, for you feel that he would lose his own rather than endanger yours. And this grandson of his who stands by my side has the same red blood in his veins. One of the things of which he is legitimately proud is that his son, who is the village blacksmith, is also one of Zermatt's noted guides, so that the tradition of the Taugwalder family is handed on from father to son.

As the sun breaks through the clouds, we leave this hero of snow and ice, feeling that we have spent one of the great hours of life in listening to the story of a man who would be surprised if anyone called him "great."

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