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Entre Nous.

Fraser of Livingstonia.

Some of the etymologists are half-inclined to think that parson may mean a representative person, as if Christ set down in every parish a man whom He can trust, and said, I do not need to argue My case further ; here is the thing lived out ; look at it for yourselves, and judge whether, apart from Me, there is anything like that.

If that be so, then most of us ministers must feel with shame how grievously we fail Him !

But, as one moves through life, now and then one comes on men and women who are such representative people, and to whom we are proud to point as proofs of what the faith can do ; who make the whole thing, at its biggest, credible. So Matthew Arnold felt about his father.

And through thee I believe
In the noble and great who are gone ;
Pure souls honour'd and blest
By former ages, who else—
Such, so soulless, so poor,
Is the race of men whom I see—
Seem'd but a dream of the heart,
Seem'd but a cry of desire.

So masses of folk felt of Donald Fraser. As James Moffatt, himself a great Christian, puts it, 'when he came it was like a breath of fresh air, or the tide rising on the beach ; his personality put so much into our lives. It's a gift of God to have witnessed such a life' ; or the Bishop of Johannesburg—summing him up as 'one of the best bits of Christian evidence it had ever been my good fortune to come across' ; or Raven, 'one of the very few in whom one felt at once the Eternal quality.'

When he died there was a huge gap left. And it seemed useless to try to depict or to explain him to those who had never known him. Any biography could only be a kind of wireless photograph, blurred and indistinct, not the real man. Your botanist pulls a flower to pieces, and look, says he, here are the stamens, here the petals, here the this and that, and—yes, that's all. But it is not all. That poor withering little heap is not the flower ; the poise, the secret, the something that made it has escaped him. So one might catalogue exactly the splendid head and eyes, the irresistible smile, the glory of the voice, the courage, the humour, dashing off clever little sketches, the devoutness, the kindness, the burning faith, the unconditional surrender to the Master, the tireless eagerness in

service, the sheer loveliness, and much else, and yet give no impression of the whole. Nor, when news came that his wife had essayed the task, was one's uneasiness abated. For, as a rule, wifely biographies are not to be commended. Either the artist stands too near the canvas, or else she creates a weird, unearthly Burne-Jones kind of thing, all sheen and willowy gracefulness, with far too little honest flesh and blood. But in this instance skill and humour and sanity have saved the situation, and the life of *Donald Fraser of Livingstonia* (Hodder & Stoughton ; 7s. 6d. net) stands out as an authentic portrait, till almost one can hear the voice, and see the man, and feel the old inspiration yet again.

It is a great tale Mrs. Fraser has to tell. The happy hearted laddie in the rowdy little circle in the Free Church manse at Lochgilphead ; the shy, likeable, somewhat undistinguished boy at the High School of Glasgow ; and then in student days Christ called him, and he gave himself in whole-hearted surrender ; and at Christ's touch gifts and faculties that had been dormant in him sprang into being, full-sized and impressive from the very first. Fraser never had to learn to speak. He was a consummate orator from the beginning. Unconsciously and without seeking for them, he possessed almost every possible art ; and these, allied to his sincerity and the enthusiasms burning up his very soul, made him a leader of his student generation everywhere he went, while he himself was still a boy. The humblest of men, he never sought place or distinction, yet they fell to him by natural right. Again and again he would stand back, while pushing others forward. But no other would do. For his voice swept his generation where it would. He preached the Kingdom, and numbers flocked to it. Caught by a phrase which never impressed some of us, he urged 'the World for Christ within this generation,' and so many offered for the foreign field that he himself, among the earliest of the volunteers, was almost crowded out of the service of his own Church. Long years afterwards the Bishop of Peterborough, preaching to the University of Glasgow—that ancient seat of learning with its long and distinguished roll of fame—began, 'I am proud to preach to the University of Donald Fraser,' who, caught away by bigger things, had left without taking a degree !

His life as a missionary was one long triumph. True, he went out in propitious times, when Laws'

statesmanship had laid the foundations, and when the winds of God had risen and were blowing through those lands. But at once he stepped to a place among those who can never be forgotten. Difficulties there were in plenty—the enervating climate luring tired men from reading and from study, political problems, not always, it would seem, too wisely handled by certain of the Government officials; the endless calls of preaching to crowds who would not go away, of organizing, of building, of superintending schools, of training native pastors, of translation, of being a father and a leader to whole races who, won by his character, looked up to him and followed him and trusted him implicitly. And still the flame went leaping out and out, and new problems emerged for swift decision and solution, and the man—who never took a holiday except when he broke down in health—gave himself with both hands. A dam has to be built, and he studies the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and builds it; a new church is being organized, and daringly he creates the office of female elder; epidemics swept the land, and he toils as if he were a doctor; in every way the people have to be taught to stand on their own feet, to undertake responsibility and let the missionary fade into the background, to be both Africans and Christians. And untiringly he does it, and their love followed him everywhere. Their attitude to him was that of the little fellow who, seeing his white friend, toddled to him, and held his hand all through the sermon. And then the Holy Ghost fell on the land, and Pentecost had come.

It was a great life, greatly lived. The Church at home called him to the highest office in its gift. And through his Moderatorial year he flamed through the country—making his own bed to save his hostesses in the country manses that added trouble, lost among the delighted children everywhere, inspiring endless services and meetings with something of the heat of his own zeal.

The South African churches—with the old war feeling still alive and smouldering—invite him to tour their land—a delicate task—to help them in their racial difficulties. And, except here and there where the surface of the soil remained unbroken, the thing became a veritable triumph. And then, to their dismay, his friends heard he was being called back as a Secretary in the Church's Offices at home. 'Go and look at a lion in a cage,' one wrote to him, 'before you make up your mind.' And the simile was apt. He didn't want to come; yet the Church called; and he rose up, but not without misgivings. 'Come back to Scotland with me, and help me not

to make a failure of my life,' he wrote his wife. It was no failure. But the greatest days were past. He was no ecclesiastic. And, unless one is a Zoroastrian, one must boldly presume ecclesiastics, too, must have some place in the intricate plans of God. But the time spent upon minutiae seemed to him often largely wasted. He longed for a chapel in the Offices where men immured in the dust of Committeedom could see the eternal stars. He was quite sure that the endless appeals for funds, and adroit methods for rounding each new corner were merely makeshifts at the best, that if only the Church would fall in love with Jesus Christ all else would follow of itself. And he kept seeking to create new inspiration from that highest source. He toiled immeasurably and had his reward. Yet, full and rich and splendid though it was, it was only an appendix in small print to what had gone before. Yet what a life it was in every chapter of it!

All that he came to give
He gave, and went again.
I have seen one man live,
I have seen one man reign
With all the graces in his train.

Lionel Johnson's whole magnificent poem might have been penned for him. And he has left a joy, an inspiration, and a reproach. For he has raised the standard, and our own mean ways look even shabbier than ever. For, as the Minute of the native Session in his own Loudon put it in their exquisite tribute, when he left them to come home, 'We are ashamed we have not caught the infection of a like heart.'

A. J. GOSSIP.

Glasgow.

Agonia.

'In a little Greek Testament which Gairdner (the late Canon Gairdner of Cairo) gave his friend on his departure for Africa was written in Greek, "Agonia is the measure of success," and Fraser never parted with it till two years ago when he handed it to his son, going out to serve the people for whom he himself had known such travail "that Christ might be born in them."'¹

'I stopped sinning.'

'On his arrival in Africa, Fraser found the people in that early and perhaps inevitable stage in Christian evangelism at which, having given up some of those practices that entangled them and prevented them from taking the first step into Christian liberty,

¹ Agnes R. Fraser, *Donald Fraser of Livingstonia*, 25.

they were largely occupied in denouncing what they had abandoned. He lamented this negative attitude, fostered by eloquent sermons from the preachers on such evils as polygamy, drinking, and Sabbath-breaking. The people were apt to think of the new teaching as the acceptance of a revised set of tabus. Such a conversation as the following, between him and a woman applicant for baptism, was only too typical. "Why do you want to follow Jesus, Mama?" "Because He died for our sins." "Have you sins?" "No?" "Do you mean that you never sin, never do wrong?" "No, not now." "You must be a very wonderful woman! There are none of us who are as good as that. I think you cannot know much about Jesus Christ if you are so contented with your own life. Mama, there are still many things in your life that you have to be saved from." "Is that so? I thought that when I stopped pounding flour on Sunday I had stopped sinning."¹

God's Love.

'We were told that the end was unexpectedly near. Hurrying back, Catherine [his daughter] and I [his wife, Dr. Agnes R. Fraser] found him propped up in bed, struggling painfully for breath. It was long before he could speak, but finally he managed to whisper, "I think I am a little easier now." A moment later he asked, "Do they say I may go now?" It was as if he had been waiting for permission, for when I told him he might go any minute now, his face lighted up, and he said, "Oh, I go joyfully!"

'He seemed to want to say something more and I bent closer and asked, "Are you sending your love to the children?" "God's love," he amended, "and God's love to you," turning to the surgeon who stood on the other side of the bed. And so, having given for the last time the message he had preached and revealed all through his life, he passed on.'²

Church-goers.

'A friend of mine, a parish priest, was visiting one afternoon and came to a small shop, kept by a man and his wife. The shopkeepers were friendly and talkative, and they spoke much of the difficulties of trade, especially the number of bad debts they had.

"If I could get in all the money on my books," said the tradesman, "we should be all right, but as it is we are up against it hard."

¹ *Ibid.* 168.

² *Ibid.* 316.

'Later on the parson said, "When am I going to see you two at church again? It is a long time since you have been."

'They hedged for a bit, but finally the old favourite came out, "I don't see much good in going to church. I don't see that the people who go to church are any better than those who stay away."

"Well, look here," said the parson, "I am not a betting man, but I'll make you a bet now and up to my limit. You bring out your books and we will look at them, and I'll bet you five pounds to one that you won't find five per cent. of church-goers among those who owe you money."

"Go on, George," said his wife, "take him on." But George waited, mentally reviewing his list. Finally he shook his head. "No, sir, I won't take that. Church-goers pay their debts."

'But there is more than honesty in money matters. If the bad church-goer is about the worst thing in a community, the best of the church-goers are the best of a community, and naturally.'³

A Desert Journal.

What is pleasanter to read than a volume of well-written letters, especially when they tell of strange lands and peoples? And so it was with reluctance that we laid down *A Desert Journal*, Letters from Central Asia by three members of the China Inland Mission—Evangeline French, Mildred Cable, and Francesca French (Constable; 7s. 6d. net). The beautiful photographs add to the attractiveness of the book. The letters were written in unusual places, some from the shade of Tibetan lamaseries, many from mud shelters in the Gobi. Their dispatch was a problem. On occasions when brigands controlled the area and censored letters, 'the journals were cut into strange patterns to be brought together again by the friend who received and circulated them.'

In the spring of 1928 these three indomitable women, already with over thirty years' experience of the dangers and privations of Central Asia, started to go back after a brief furlough in England. The letters cover the period from 1928 to 1932, when the next furlough was due. They had hoped to go back by the simplest and least expensive route—by the Trans-Siberian Railway, *via* Moscow to Omsk. Thence by river steamer, followed by five days' drive in a *tarantass* to Chuguchak, where Chinese carts could be hired for the three months' journey across Turkestan and the Gobi Desert to Suchow. But the Soviet Government would not give them a

³ K. E. Maclean, *Our Reasonable Service*.

permit to pass through Siberia, and so they had to choose a longer route *via* India. It is with a delightful touch of humour that they explain why the permit was not forthcoming. It was owing to 'trouble on the Afghan Border,' they were told. They explained that the route they meant to go would not bring them within a thousand miles of Afghanistan. The refusal was a mystery until, searching the daily papers for news of the Afghan Border, they found the announcement that the Amir had determined to cut the Moscow visit from the programme of his European tour, and this was followed by the remark that 'this decision had given great satisfaction in Britain.'

In their journey through India they visited the Women's Medical College at Ludhiana, and then spent some time with Amy Wilson Carmichael at the Dohnavur Settlement. In crossing China 'the strongest impression' they gained was 'that the mental apathy which formerly rested upon the masses is lifted, and *China is thinking*.'

Broken by periodic rests at Suchow, their base, they made a succession of missionary journeys. On one of these they travelled for a hundred and thirteen days, arriving at last at Urumchi, where they were met by Mr. Hunter and Mr. Mather, also of the China Inland Mission. 'Our kind hosts, after taking a good look at us, said: "There is plenty of hot water for those who want baths." We hastened to explain that a great deal of it was sunburn, but gladly acquiesced in the thoughtful suggestion.' The journeys make an amazing story—discomforts from dirt, ticks, mosquitoes, extremes of temperature from steamy heat to twenty-four degrees below zero, dangers from armed bandits, and from tempest and flood. 'At mid-stream in the first channel the Flying Turki (their native cart) suddenly sank beneath us, and in a moment we were at water-level and the mules struggling in difficulties. At all costs the cart must be lightened, and without hesitation we threw ourselves into the water . . . For two hours eleven men struggled to save our things. Twice the mules' heads were under water . . . We still had three hours' ride in wet clothes before we reached a house where we could pitch the tents. The kind farmer let us draw on his winter stock of dried desert thorn, and in a few moments a huge bonfire flared on the threshing-floor, around which we stood in steaming clothes, which were already stiffening to ice in the evening cold.' As we read these letters we remember with some amusement an objection recently made to the ministry of women

in the Methodist Church, that for them the itinerating system was too full of discomfort.

What sustained these three missionaries? Writing in 1932 on their way back to England, they say, 'We saw our last fellow countrywoman in the autumn of 1928, but we have been neither lonely nor deprived. Indeed, we have been gloriously happy in the carrying out of our commission, and have proved the truth of Christ's words: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." We have known joy unspeakable as men and women came from darkness into light.'

Mt. xiii. 30.

'The agrarian population was drivingly busy, weeding the wheat fields. We tried to earn our supper by giving some assistance, but found that in the attempt to separate "true wheat" from "false wheat," we were as blundering on the physical plane as Christ has warned us we should be on the spiritual. The two plants were so much alike that specimens laid side by side could only be botanically differentiated by observing the length and position of the hairs on stalk and blade. The difference, however, was in the root, but as soon as this had been torn up, there was no remedy, only vain regret, to find that wheat had been destroyed and tares spared. Long practice and trained observation has made the Chinese adepts at the work, but it was a lesson of more value than many sermons, to sit in those fields and realise why the Lord said: "Let them both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will direct the reapers."'¹

Errata.

We have to apologize for some errata. On the second page (col. 1, line 6) of Professor du Plessis' article on 'The Results of Missions,' 'thousand' *should have been* 'hundred.' Last month there was no time for proofs of Dr. Garvie's account of the 'Church Controversy in Germany,' and the following errors should be corrected: Page 140, col. 1, line 12, 'farce' *should be* 'force'; line 31, 'care' *should be* 'core'; col. 2, line 8, 'Revenlaw' *should be* 'Revenlow'; line 21, 'Fürst's' *should be* 'Füer's.'

¹ *A Desert Journal*, 54.