

William Kelly



WILLIAM KELLY — the title-pages of whose works generally bear only the initials "W. K." — was born in the North of Ireland, in 1820. Being early left fatherless, he was already supporting himself by tuition to the family of Mr. Cachemaille, Rector of Sark, when, in 1840, he made the Christian confession, and he shortly afterwards embraced the views of the church characteristic to "brethren", with whom he then at once united. He retained a close connection with the Channel Islands for thirty years, residing chiefly in Guernsey, but for the latter half of his Christian career his home was at Blackheath.

He was a graduate, in classical honours, of Trinity College, Dublin, and was recognised as not merely a sound, erudite scholar, but a controversialist of formidable calibre. Besides aiding Dr. S. P. Tregelles in his investigations as a Biblical textual critic, Mr. Kelly himself published, in 1860, a critical edition of the Revelation of John, which Professor Heinrich Ewald, of Goettingen, declared was the best piece of English work of the kind that he had seen.

Such studies were carried on concurrently with the editing of a periodical entitled 'The Prospect'. He took up the editorship of 'The Bible Treasury' in 1857, and continued till his death, 50 years after. As editor of the 'B. T.' he was brought into correspondence with such men as Dean Alford, Dr. Scott the lexicographer (whom he convinced of the true force of the word unhappily rendered in the Authorised Version of 2 Thessalonians 2: 2, as "is at hand"), Principal Edwards (who confessed to Mr. Kelly his conversion to the pre-millennial standpoint), with Professor Sanday, of Oxford, and other living theologians.

After the capitulation of younger ecclesiastical associates to the Higher Criticism, Archdeacon Denison spoke of Mr. Kelly's periodical as the only religious magazine any longer worth reading — so steadfast was the editor in his rejection of what he believed to be Christ-dishonouring views of the Bible.

His simplicity and self-suppression may be illustrated by the reply he made to a Dublin professor who had expressed an opinion that, if Mr. Kelly did but settle there as a teacher, he would make a fortune — "For which world?"

His supreme delight was in ministering in things spiritual to those whom he described as the "few despised ones of Christ's flock." To such service he gave untiring energy, put forth to within two months of his decease. He identified himself whole-heartedly with the body of doctrine developed by the late John Nelson Darby, whose right-hand man he was for many years, till he severed his connection, and formed a party which for long bore his name.

The "Collected Writings" of J.N.D. were edited by Mr. Kelly, who has done much by his own expositions to give currency to the views enshrined in them. His own merits were manifest alike in oral and written ministry. Mr. C. H. Spurgeon, judging by the latter, has applied to Mr. Kelly, in the "Guide to Commentaries," the words of Pope, "born for the universe..." In the list of his writings will be found Lectures or Notes on all the Books of the Bible.

How long he retained his clearness and vigour of intellect comes out in the fact that several of his best expositions appeared during the last fifteen years of his life. Within the lifetime of J.N.D. (1800-1882),

Mr. Kelly was already well known to outsiders by his lectures on the Pentateuch, the Gospel of Matthew, the Revelation of John, the Church of God, and the New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, besides Notes on Romans, etc., recommended by Professor Sandy. Since 1890 he has put forth "In the Beginning" (Gen. 1, 2), commended by Archbishop Benson; and Exposition of the Prophecies of Isaiah, of the Gospel of John, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, of the Epistles of John; a volume of 600 pages on "God's Inspiration of the Scriptures;" and his last words on "Christ's Coming Again, " in which he vindicates the originality of J.N.D. in regard to the "Secret Rapture;" this had been impugned by an American writer.

The last prominent survivor of the first generation of "brethren " fell asleep on the 27th March, 1906.

Shortly before he passed away, W.K. said to one by his bedside: "There are three things real — the Cross, the enmity of the world, the love of God." An aged clergyman, who had long resorted to him for counsel, on hearing of his decease, wrote:

"He was pre-eminently 'a faithful man, and feared God above many' (Neh. 7. 2)."