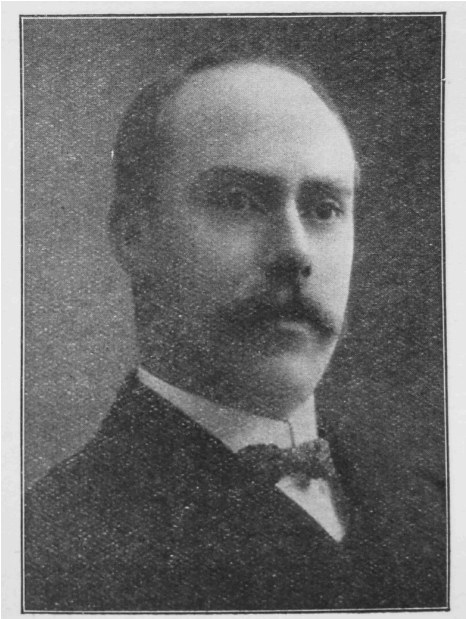
Character Studies. By “SKETCHEM.”

ARTHUR T. GUTTERY.

“To that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his
valour.”
—MEASURE FOR MEASURE—Act 3, Sc. I.

“I prefer the storms of liberty to the serenity of slavery.”
—*Palatine of Posnania.*


REV. A. T. GUTTERY.

IN the year 1836, in the city of Cork, a little group of Protestants banded themselves together for the promotion of the principles of total abstinence. The wits of Cork laughed heartily at the craze; and when it got whispered round that men not yet in a lunatic asylum had taken up the notion that human life was possible without alcoholic liquors, contempt for the new movement became general.

There was, at this time, toiling laboriously amid the squalor and poverty of Cork, a young Capuchin friar named Theobald Mathew. Not content with discharging the ordinary duties of his sacred calling, he set up schools, infant and adult, Sunday and week-day, rented lofts in which he established industrial teaching, and actively indentified himself with every good and charitable work in the city of Cork. His name became a household word; his unselfish labours for the welfare of the poor, the theme of every citizen; his labours inevitably brought him into association with philanthropic men of every shade of opinion including the newly-formed band of temperance workers. Foremost among the latter, was a steady Quaker merchant named William Martin. Now Martin clearly saw, that no matter how zealous he and his co-workers were, no one but a Catholic could give their movement real success among the common people; and one day he, in a burst of passionate entreaty, said to the friar, “Oh, Theobald Mathew, Theobald Mathew, what *thou* couldst do, if thou wouldst only take up the work of banishing the fiend that desolates the homes of thy people !”

The young priest appeared smitten as by some mysterious power. He went moodily home pondering the words of the Quaker, which for days to come, were to ring unceasingly in his ears. Finally, he decided his course of action; and on the 10th April, 1838, he rose from his knees in his little oratory and cried aloud: “Here goes—here goes, in the name of God!” Thus entered Father Mathew on that work with which his name is so memorably associated—a work destined in a few brief years to count its converts by millions, and to spread its influence over the whole of the English-speaking world.

“Here goes, in the name of God!” From a Capuchin friar uttering these memorable words in the city of Cork in 1838, to a Primitive Methodist Missionary Secretary in the city of London, in this present year of grace, is a long hark-back—a stretch of seventy years. Men born when the apostle of temperance entered on his great crusade, if still alive, are standing to-day very near to the turnstiles of night. And there are, in all probability, traits of character even the most desultory comparison of the two men would reveal which separate them as widely as do these intervening years. But when every allowance for the differences of heredity, training, environment, and even dissimilarity of temperament have been made, there still remains something in the heroic words of one, that is eminently characteristic of the magnificent abandon of the other. Given a cause concerning the righteousness of which he is fully convinced, and Mr. Guttery will strike home for it with as rare an enthusiasm, with as quenchless a courage as that which distinguished Father Mathew in his fight with the whiskey-fiend of Cork. And as (in the metaphor of battle) he flings

himself upon the foe, one seems to hear him echoing the soul-stirring war-cry of the Capuchin — "Here goes—here goes, in the name of God!"

The Primitive Methodist Church is proud—pardonably and justly proud—of Arthur Guttery. He is one of her most brilliant and highly gifted sons. "Brilliant" is the first word one applies to both the man and his work. That praise cannot be denied—or spared. Yet it is impossible to believe that the effect he produces is unconsciously attained, as a sort of unearned increment of his labours in the searching and setting forth of the articles of his faith. One feels, somehow, that however well he has builded, he builded no better than he knew. Possessing one of the quickest and keenest minds at present at play in our Connexional life, he invariably furnishes evidence, even in the hour of his greatest enthusiasm, that although he feels intensely, his judgments are not delivered hopelessly bound into the hands of his sympathies.

As an orator of almost the highest rank he has a great reputation both inside Primitive Methodism and far beyond it. His temperament lacks, possibly, some of the qualities necessary to eloquence of the very highest order. His intellect is not pre-eminently imaginative or poetical, and imagination and poetry have something to do with oratory. There is a note of impatience in the thought, now and again, a loose structure in the sentences; sometimes, a want of finish and delicacy. His voice lacks flexibility; its tones are harsh, sometimes rather strident, and there is just the suspicion of a lisp. His style is uneven—sometimes jerky. He has not that large and easy movement, which is, for instance, one of his friend Dr. Clifford's most striking qualities. But then, why measure Mr. Guttery by a standard, that so far as I know, he has never professed to reach. He has what he needs for his purpose, and an ample margin; and its possession, together with the exercise thereof, has enabled him to become a gifted and popular preacher, a debater who has, at most, but one living superior in the Connexion, and out of sight, the first platform speaker in Primitive Methodism.

Nor do these little blemishes of style to which I have alluded, really matter. What matters — what impresses you — what, after listening to Mr. Guttery, you will carry away with you as a permanent memory, is the indomitable courage and the sincerity of the man, apparent to even the most careless beholder. You cannot listen to a single speech of his, still less can you hear him repeatedly, without feeling that his utterances are the words of a man who has mastered his subjects; who is no amateur pottering about on the margin of things, who shrinks from no labour with a definite purpose before him, who is capable of affairs, and capable of imparting his knowledge of them to other people; a man with something more than the courage of his opinions; with the strength of intellect and of will to impress them upon his hearers, and sooner or later engraft them on the institutions of his Church.

An orator who is to move the people must be a man of the people at bottom—not a democrat in a political sense merely—not necessarily a Socialist—but one who holds that men are born equal, or, at any rate, are born men. And there is no man in England that a definition of this sort more fittingly describes than Arthur Guttery. "For there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male or female, but ye are all one in Christ Jesus," is the keynote of all his splendid service, and the secret of his power to inspire his brethren on the work-a-day fields of life with a noble purpose and high resolve. In a larger measure than most men, he has cultivated the gift of communicating great truths in language that arouses in ordinary human nature the deepest, the most ennobling of emotions, and sets the common mind soaring towards a realisation of the liberty that makes men free.

Fora great public meeting, Mr. Guttery is the greatest "draw" in the Connexion. His speeches are always direct, always effective, out of all proportion to any machinery of rhetoric evident to the eye scanning them in print, and never, by any chance, tedious or dull. It is recorded of a certain criminal in Italy that he was suffered to make his choice between reading Guicciardini and the galleys. He chose the history. But the war of Pisa was too much for him. He changed his mind, and went to the oar. Now, whoever else it may have enveloped in its folds, the mantle of Guicciardini has certainly not descended on Mr. Guttery. Surely none but a child of the Katskill Mountains could "nod off" under *him*? I do not know if there is any authentic instance on record of any fellow who managed to get in his forty winks during such time as our connexional orator has been "holding forth." If there is, then surely it must be held to rank as equal to anything achieved in this direction by the immortal Fat Boy in "Pickwick."

It has never been Mr. Guttery's habit to mince words, and his invective loves a shining target. He goes to the point of a story as an arrow goes to its mark; not less swift, direct and sure. He is ever ready with a caustic criticism, a sparkling epigram, an apt anecdote, a pungent comment on the uppermost topic of the day—swift, appropriate, copious, equally wonderful for variety and precision. In the main, he uses the language of a man who is obviously discontented with the existing organisation of society; who has set his hand to the task of helping to bring in the day of re-adjustment, the hour of the righting of the wrong. "I am an agitator," he cries for all to hear; "simply an agitator; but I'm proud of my job."

There are some men, that, at the risk of doing them an injustice, we do not readily associate with the gentler attributes of human nature; and Mr. Guttery is one of them. We are so used to seeing him in the fighting line that we are apt to overlook his "softer hour." Yet he can, on occasion, be as tender as a woman; and then, especially, he is his father's son. Thomas Guttery was a man who probably possessed the gift of moving eloquence in larger measure than any other Primitive Methodist preacher that ever lived. I have, on more than one occasion, seen every member of his congregation melted into tears. And his son, is, when he chooses, a consummate master of the art of which in literature Barrie is possibly the chief exponent—that of combining humour and pathos in the closest juxtaposition. One may be made to rock with laughter at one of his witty sallies, only to find, the next moment one's heart so searched by one inevitable word, the nature so stirred by one magic phrase as to compel to a flood of scalding tears. For my own part, I heartily wish Mr. Guttery would cultivate his "softer side" with more assiduity. The influence which he to-day excites in the Church he loves, and so splendidly serves, great as it is, could, I feel confident, be deepened and strengthened were he to give what he is so eminently fitted to give—a greater prominence to the emotional appeal. For whether cool and subdued, or warm and dominant, emotion is after all an integral part of all those finer feelings that make for personal righteousness.

Meanwhile there his work in the self-confessed role of agitator; and the duty of an agitator, as Mr. Guttery obviously apprehends it, is not merely the attacking of crying evils, but the rousing of men out of that blasphemous contentment in which they preserve a silence as of the damned. He believes in a "good time coming"—but he does not commit the Colossal error of supposing that it has all but arrived—that we are living in an age requiring but a few deft touches, to transform it into one of millenial glory. There is a sanctified optimism truly of which Mr. Guttery is a gifted exponent; there is spurious optimism—a fool's paradise in which all perspective is levelled in a dreary mass of satisfaction—that he never ceases to condemn.

"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world," sang Browning, and ever since men have been mumbling a shibboloth, the latter part of which is as false as the word of Sapphira—God's in his heaven truly—*most* men believe that; but all is *not* right with the world. . . For the complacent, well-fed, well-governed, highly-successful poet it may have been, and in many of his prosperous devotees doubtless is; but for tens of thousands in the throbbing, surging, human crowd the world's all wrong. "Let be, let be, all things are good," cry the everlasting optimists. For them the slums of Southwark constitute a city of rare enchantment, and Whitechapel the ante-chamber of the Kingdom of Heaven. And the worst of it is, that the crowd acquiesce in this attempt to embrace everything in a scheme of universal approbation, and sink into a slough of contentment that terminates in mortification, into a complete satisfaction that is indistinguishable from death.

This is one of the things that Arthur Guttery is endeavouring to grapple with, and, if possible, to strangle the life out of. He realises that the Land of Promise demands for its attainment a divine discontent, an eager pushing forward; and devotes himself to the gigantic task of startling men out of their blasphemous contemptment which partakes of the nature of that sin for which there is no place for repentance, though it be sought bitterly and with tears. Yet even this is but part of his work. He has other aims—other tasks towards the accomplishment of which he has resolutely set his face. His career has scarcely reached its zenith—and I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet. But whatever the future holds, I believe this man can be trusted to stand fast—to remain faithful to those glorious ideals which hitherto have been for him the incentive to so much of splendid endeavour and great achievement. Some public men change their opinions with a frequency which had they happened to have been shirts, would have been distinctly meritorious. Not so Mr. Guttery. About *his* opinions there is an element of permanence, because, in the main, they are based on those eternal principles whose foundations be far below all earth-grown

banners of creed or race, or language, and over which all change passes harmlessly—as storms over the depths of the fathomless sea.

References

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