

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY
OF
EMINENT MEN OF FIFE,
OF PAST AND PRESENT TIMES,
NATIVES OF THE COUNTY, OR CONNECTED WITH IT BY
PROPERTY, RESIDENCE, OFFICE, MARRIAGE,
OR OTHERWISE.

BY
M. F. CONOLLY,

AUTHOR OF THE "LIFE OF BISHOP LOW," "PROFESSOR TENNANT," &c.

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tive to Glasgow University, 8vo, 1837. 9. Refutation of Charges made against Dr Lee by Dr Chalmers and Others, 8vo, 1837. 10. Observations on Lyon's "History of St Andrews," 8vo, 1839. 11. Admonition on the Observance of the Lord's Day—Address upon the Fast—Pastoral Letter on Family Worship, 1834-36. 12. Pastoral Letter for the General Assembly, 1843. 13. Catalogue of Books sold by Auction, 1842. Dr Lee died in the beginning of May 1859.

LEITCH, Rev. WILLIAM, D.D., formerly minister of Monimail, afterwards Principal of Queen's College, Canada, was born at Rothesay about the year 1817, and died at Kingston on the 9th May 1864. He completed his education in the University of Glasgow. Whilst a student in the latter institution he greatly distinguished himself in the departments of mathematics and physical science; so much so, indeed, that, for several seasons, he was intrusted with the charge of the astronomical observatory, and on various occasions conducted the classes of Dr Nichol, Professor of Astronomy, and Dr Meiklan, Professor of Natural Philosophy. During these years of study and scientific pursuit, he acquired that profound and varied knowledge, and those habits of close and accurate observation, which afterwards so much distinguished him—in short, the development of that academic mind which, in the opinion of all who knew him, pointed to the Professor's chair as his appropriate place. Everything about him, his conversation, habits, pursuits, and even household equipments, indicated the scientific enquirer. The gigantic telescope in his lobby, which his Monimail parishioners contemplated and spoke of with awe; his microscopes and other apparatus filling his study; the last scientific journal on his table; all gave indication that his was a mind that loved to keep abreast of the science of the day. Even when he took to keeping bees, the thing was done, not as a recreation, but as a matter of science. For some seasons he watched the busy insects in his garden, experimenting upon them with all sorts of contrivances; and we believe, that, at one meeting of the British Association, he embodied the results of his investigations in a memoir imparting much curious information. If we mistake not, several papers of his on this subject afterwards appeared in "Good Words." In consequence of such habits, he had no difficulty of occupying the position of popular lecturer; and there are many in this quarter who still remember with much gratification the instruction he communicated in his lectures, delivered before numerous audiences, on Astronomy, Electricity, and even such topics as Artillery projectiles, and the Minie Rifle. But astronomy was undoubtedly his forte. He wrote for "Good Words" a series of articles on his favourite theme, which were afterwards collected and published in a small volume, under the title of "God's Glory in the Heavens." It is a work of no

ordinary merit. In simple and appropriate language it explains many of the startling phenomena of the starry heavens; and without in the least disparaging the somewhat over-wrought, although instructive, volumes of his friend Dr Nichol on the same subject, we must give Mr Leitch's volume the palm of superiority for promiscuousness and a peculiarly felicitous exposition of the newest discoveries in astronomical science. He even turned his knowledge to practical account in the heating of churches—the churches of Monimail, Cupar, and many others besides, being warmed by stoves on a principle of his suggestion. It is more particularly, however, as a minister that he will be remembered in this neighbourhood. The clerical profession was that of his deliberate choice, springing from an earnest desire to benefit spiritually his fellowmen. Having been licensed to preach the Gospel in 1839, he was soon after engaged as assistant to the Rev. Dr Stevenson, at that time minister of Arbroath, and, afterwards an assistant to the aged minister of Kirkden, in the same Presbytery. In 1843, on the presentation of the late Earl of Leven and Melville, he became minister of Monimail, and there he continued till 1860, when he was selected by the Trustees of Queen's College, Kingston, for the office of Principal and Primarius Professor of Divinity in that institution. His parochial labours at Monimail were manifold, and most acceptable to all classes of his parishioners. Sabbath and week day he was ever at his post; on the former, not only officiating in the church, but also giving evening services in school-rooms in the villages; and on the latter, visiting regularly from house to house. Few ministers are in the habit of doing more parochial work, for with indefatigable assiduity he gave himself from day to day to the efficient superintendence of day schools, parish library, the poor, and especially the religious instruction of the young in the Sabbath School. Long, accordingly, will his labours be remembered in Monimail, and the kindest sentiments be awakened in the hearts of the parishioners there as they recal the bland look and genial accents of a minister whose every and most earnest desire was for their temporal and spiritual welfare. Dr Leitch was constantly writing. To use one of his own expressions, he always "studied with the pen in his hand." But we are not aware that he has left behind him any lengthened or consecutive treatise. Besides the astronomical work already referred to, he was author of many articles in "Macphail's Edinburgh Magazine," and latterly in "Good Words," to both of which periodicals he was a regular contributor. At the time of the discussions relative to our Parish Schools, he published a pamphlet on that subject, which was much thought of, and extensively circulated; and many years ago, a sermon of his was given in the second volume of the "Church of Scotland Pulpit,"

entitled the "Missionary's Warrant," perhaps the best sermon, certainly one of the most powerfully-reasoned and eloquently-worded, in the two volumes of that publication. His theology was not that of the modern and critical school, but founded on the earnest and profound study of the Evangelical Divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and therefore of a far more solid and masculine description; in a word, the good old theology of the Howes, the Baxters, and the Erskines of former days. We have no doubt that, had he been spared, he would have made a deep impression of his massively thoughtful mind on the theology of the Canadian Church; and, perhaps, left behind him a body of lectures worthy of taking their place by the side of those of the great teachers in Divinity of similar institutions. His appointment as Principal in the Canadian College has been pronounced by competent judges a great success. The College, when he entered it, and, indeed, still, may be said to be in its infancy. But no one could be better fitted than Dr Leitch for the work of organisation; and in this field he was continually labouring—straining every nerve to complete the staff of Professors in all the faculties of University study, secure adequate endowments, and acquire a prestige for the new establishment equal to that of any of the more ancient seats of learning. In addition to this, he sought to maintain in the pulpit, the platform, and committee-room, the cause of the Church of Scotland in Canada. Indeed, we have more than a suspicion that his last illness was precipitated by labours of this kind in her behalf. Instead of consecrating the summer vacation to rest from the winter's many toils, and in congenial studies, he occupied himself in travelling amongst the churches, and bearing a leading part in public and other meetings of an ecclesiastical kind, so that, when the College session commenced, he came to the duties of his chair in no small degree jaded and exhausted. He left behind him one son and one daughter to mourn his loss. His wife died at Monimail many years ago. In many parts of the country, but especially in Fife, there are friends who will never cease to cherish his memory. While his talents and learning were of the highest order, reflecting honour at once upon himself and the sacred profession to which he devoted them all, his bearing and manners were ever, and in no ordinary degree, those of the gentleman and Christian. No one ever heard him utter an unkind or ungenial word. The smile ever played upon his countenance, and his ringing laugh in private, when cheerful conversation was going on, indicated the genial sympathies of the man. Dr Leitch was a man whose personal worth, distinguished attainments, and labours in the Christian ministry had won for him the regard and affection of a large circle of friends both in Monimail and other districts of Fife. In

person he was inclined to stoutness; his head was large, and almost entirely bald; his walk somewhat lame in consequence of disease in the leg in early youth; his face ever beaming with good humour. We do not believe he was ever angry in his life; certainly, although we knew him well, and had most frequent opportunities of witnessing his deportment, sometimes in circumstances of great provocation, we do not remember a single instance of his equanimity being disturbed, or of his showing resentment in word or even look. By Dr Leitch's death the Church lost one of her most accomplished and efficient office-bearers, and all who had the honour of his friendship one of the most kindly and loving of friends. We believe his last illness—accompanied with spasms of the heart—was long continued and very severe. But many dear and attentive friends encompassed his bed—did all in their power to mitigate his sore distress, and saw him deposited in an honoured grave. His was undeniably a life of Christian usefulness; his soul in departing was cheered by the hope of the Gospel; and his end was the peace of those who die in the Lord. We learn from the "Presbyterian," a Canadian publication, that a movement had been set on foot to endow a memorial Professorship in the Theological Faculty as "a tribute to the personal worth, extensive attainments, and zealous labours of the late Principal." The proposal is to erect a new chair for Church History. In commenting upon the movement, the "Presbyterian" says:—Dr Leitch is acknowledged to have sacrificed much and toiled arduously in behalf of Queen's University. While caring incessantly for all the departments of the institution, he was particularly devoted to the business of his own class-room. His students speak with enthusiastic gratitude of the value of his prelections and of the fatherly interest he took in them as aspirants to the office of the ministry. His mode of superintending their preparations for the solemn work of caring for souls was somewhat novel, but eminently practical, and there is no doubt, as we have heard several of them remark, that had his life been spared his course when fully matured would have been most interesting and useful. A substantial tribute to the memory of such a man, to be connected in some way with the scene of his latest efforts, occurs very naturally to his friends in Scotland and in this country as a proper object for co-operation, and it is suggested, very happily we think, that it should consist of a theological professorship. No more appropriate means of honouring and perpetuating his memory could be advised. It will be infinitely better than any monument of stone or marble, more consonant with the spirit and tastes of the man whose name it will honour, a fitter reflection to posterity of the particular species of usefulness to which all his powers and acquirements were ever subservient.