

**ALTAR-LIGHT: A TRIBUTE  
TO THE MEMORY  
OF THE REV. ALEXANDER  
FLETCHER, D.D.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649332748

Altar-light: a tribute to the memory of the rev. Alexander Fletcher, D.D. by John Macfarlane

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**JOHN MACFARLANE**

**ALTAR-LIGHT: A TRIBUTE  
TO THE MEMORY  
OF THE REV. ALEXANDER  
FLETCHER, D.D.**



# ALTAR-LIGHT:

▲

Tribute to the Memory

OF THE

REV. ALEXANDER FLETCHER, D.D.

LONDON.

BY THE

REV. JOHN MACFARLANE, LL.D.

GLASGOW.

AUTHOR OF "ALTAR-GOLD," "THE NIGHT LAMP," "THE MOUNTAINS  
OF THE DESERT," ETC.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO. 21 BERNERS STREET.

1860.

210. m. 192.

LONDON:  
STRANGEWAYS & WALDEN (LATE G. BARCLAY), PRINTERS,  
23 Castle Street, Leicester Square.



## ALTAR-LIGHT.

---

JOHN, v. 35.

*“He was a burning and a shining light.”*

SUCH is the brilliant though brief tribute of our Lord to the memory of one of the most illustrious of men. It is obvious that the words refer to His forerunner, and not so much to the personal or private life as to the public ministry of the Baptist. He could not be properly termed “a light” in any sense or degree during the thirty years of his hiding in the deserts of Judea. We are not told how those years were passed, but have no doubt that they were devoted to preparation for that remarkable work which he was born to accomplish. Luke tells us that “the child grew, and waxed strong in

spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel." Now, it is evident from the narrative that his public life was comparatively a short one—probably, not exceeding a few months; all before that was spent in strictest privacy. It took forty years in the wilderness to qualify Moses for the work he had to do; ten years less were sufficient for the Baptist—but even that seems greatly disproportionate. The forty years of Moses' curriculum were followed by as many of hard and important service; whereas the thirty years of John were succeeded by only a few months of ministry to the Lord. Hitherto he had lived alone with God; none of the people were with him; but when the time of his "showing unto Israel" arrived, he became a "burning and a shining light." We are not to judge of the importance or magnitude of any work by the time taken to do it. In six days God made the heavens and the earth. Besides, John did a vast amount of work of which we have no account. This is obvious, from the splendid encomiums passed upon him by our Lord. To "prepare a way" for the Saviour of men implies an immense deal more than what appears. We have every reason to believe that John did more for Christ during his short ministry than any



former servant of Jehovah. True, that ministry arose in darkness, and was quenched in death; it came up from a wilderness, and disappeared in a dungeon: but it was a most magnificent thing, notwithstanding. Like some blazing comet or fiery meteor it shot athwart the firmament, clearing rapidly the course for the greater light that was soon to enlighten the whole world. The ministry of Christ Himself resembles John's. He, too, had thirty years of preliminary retirement and preparation before entering upon the work which His Father gave Him to do; and we cannot forget that His career began in a manger and was wound up on a cross. The ministry of Christ's servants is also preceded by a long course of study, and meditation, and prayer, from which they are often taken down suddenly to the valley of the shadow of death. The entire service, indeed, of the Christian pastorate is just one loud, solemn, unbroken voice, calling upon a sinful world to repent and "behold the Lamb of God." Nor shall this voice cease till it be changed into these other and final words,— "Behold He cometh with clouds!" and then shall the end be.

The termination of such a striking ministry as John's could not fail to impress his own

disciples, and justified the beautiful tribute paid him in the text. Jesus could no longer refer to him as alive. The Baptist was dead. That mysterious and austere-looking prophet was now no more; and the manner of his death, which was alike startling and humiliating, seemed to call for some such tribute. Not a few of the mighty ones of the Bible have had extraordinary translations or deaths appointed to them. Enoch was not, for God took him; Aaron and Moses were carried to the tops of high mountains, and there were laid down and died; Jonathan was slain in the battle-field; Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire; John was beheaded; Jesus was crucified. The death of the Baptist, however, only the more impressed Jesus in his favour. "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." We see, then, that the great and good servants of Jesus die as well as others; and that to judge aright of their characters we are to look, not so much to the manner of their death as to their life, and especially to their services on behalf of Christ and His cause. We also see that they die only after their work is finished, when they are translated to their rest and reward above. And, finally, we see that

even after death the Master they served does not forget them, but inscribes on imperishable record His admiration of their character and His appreciation of their conduct. Such are some of the consolations that remain to surviving relatives and congregations when they are called upon to weep over departed worth. In further discoursing on the words of our text, I shall endeavour in a very cursory manner to sketch a few of the more remarkable features in the ministry of the Baptist; I shall then improve the subject in connexion with the solemn event which has clothed us in the garb of the mourner, and filled our hearts with deep but holy griefs. Concerning the ministry of John I remark that—

## I.

## IT WAS A TRANSITION MINISTRY!

Our Lord says, "He was a light." This figure cannot refer to the stars, which are fixed and stationary; nor to the planets, which, though wandering in their spheres, have appointed revolutions; nor to the sun, which unceasingly describes the same orbit. It must refer to some of those wonderful phenomena in the heavens which appear but for a short time, serve some