

# THE KING'S SON;

OR,

## A MEMOIR OF BILLY BRAY.

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### CHAPTER. III.

#### JOY UNSPEAKABLE AND FULL OF GLORY.

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—1 PET. i. 8. “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.”—PHIL. iv. 4.

**H**ENRY WARD BEECHER says: “It is always infelicitous when men fall into the habit of speaking of religion as the mother of trials, and of their Christian experience from the side of its restrictions and limitations. . . . When people want to make things attractive in farming, they give exhibitions of their products. The women bring their very best butter, moulded into tempting golden lumps; and the men bring the noblest beets and vegetables of every kind; and from the orchards they bring the rarest fruits; and when you go into the room where all these things are displayed, they seem to you attractive and beautiful.

“It seems to me that this is the way a Christian church ought to represent the Christian life. You ought to pile up your apples and pears and peaches and flowers and vegetables, to show what is the positive fruit of religion. But many people in Christian life do as farmers would do who should go to a show, and carry—one, pigweed; another, thistles; another, dock; and another, old hard lumps of clay; and should arrange these worthless things along the sides of the room, and mourn over them. What sort of husbandry would that be? Christians are too apt to represent the dark side of religion in their conversation and meetings.”

It was Billy Bray's excellence and glory that he always represented the *bright* side of religion to his fellows; to him, indeed, it had no other. He had a nature that tended “to produce joy;” but whatever may be the temperament of persons, unquestionably “the effect of the whole of religious living is to produce joyfulness.”

Payson said on his dying bed: “If men only knew the honour and glory that awaited them in Christ, they would go about the streets crying out, ‘I am a Christian! I am a Christian!’ that men might rejoice with them in the blessedness of which they were soon to partake.” Billy did this all his life

long, and verily he had his reward. He tells us, soon after his conversion: “I was very happy in my *work*, and could leap and dance for joy under ground<sup>1</sup> as well as on the surface. My comrades used to tell me, that was no religion, dancing, shouting, and making so much ‘to-do.’ But I was born in the *fire*, and could not live in the *smoke*. They said there was no need to leap, and dance, and make so much noise, for the Lord was not deaf, and He knows our hearts. And I would reply: “But you must know that the devil is not deaf either, and yet his servants make a great noise. The devil would rather see us doubting than hear us shouting.””

The reader can easily imagine what were Billy’s favourite portions of Scripture and hymns, but we may quote one or two of the former that he repeated thousands of times. “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever” (Psalm xxx. 11, 12). “Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow” (Jer. xxxi. 13). The idea that these and similar passages had a figurative and not a literal meaning, he held in the greatest contempt. If persons attempted, either playfully or in earnest, to argue the point with him, he would turn upon them all his powers of wit and sarcasm, and all his treasures of experience and Scripture, and such was his holy ardour and impetuosity that from such assaults many found the only safe refuge to be either silence or flight. “David danced,” he never forgot to tell us, “before the Lord with all his might,” and that he “and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of a trumpet,” and that what David did surely all the people might do under a *happier* dispensation; and that the opposition of the unconverted or formal professors was like that of “Saul’s daughter,” who, when she saw “King David leaping and dancing before the Lord,” “despised him in her heart.” The song of Moses and the children of Israel after they had safely passed through the Red Sea, he also used with excellent effect. To any person who objected to the meetings on account of their noise and uproar, and many have objected to them on that account, he thought it quite enough to say that when the foundation of the second temple was laid “all the people shouted with a great shout,” and “that the people could not discern the voice of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.” On any who said:

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<sup>1</sup> Once he said he had felt “the joys of religion at 250!” *i.e.*, “two hundred and fifty fathoms below grass.”

“But what confusion is this here?  
What noise of tumult do I hear?  
How ill it suits this place!”

and who demanded that “calm serenity should prevail” when they worshipped God, that their “pleas,” like “tranquil sonnets,” might “*gently* pierce the peaceful skies,” he would retort “that we must have a *full* joy ourselves to know what a full joy means;” and he hardly ever failed to add, “Our blessed Lord has said, Ask, and ye shall receive, *that your joy may be full.*”

The account of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem was another choice incident, sweeter to his taste than honey or the honeycomb. He used to positively revel in the statements, “And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And if it happened at the time of a contested election he would sometimes ask, “May all the people shout ‘ — for ever!’ and no person find fault, and may not Billy Bray shout ‘Jesus for ever?’”

Usually, I suppose, his remarks would be to the following effect, as Mr. Maynard says that he has so heard him speak many a time: “If this is worth shouting for, our election is worth far more, for those who get elected, and sent up to the House of Commons, may soon die, or lose their seat at the next election, consequently their honour and happiness may not last long; but, if we get elected into the Lord’s Parliament, and once get into the Parliament House of Heaven, we shall never die, never get turned out; hence, we have more reason to shout than they.”

But the narrative of the lame man, “whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which was called “Beautiful,” was perhaps most precious of all. “And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.” If he made this incident the subject of an address, he would ask if the dear Lord could not now do as He had done in days of old? He had healed a cripple forty years old, who leaped for joy when he was healed; and Billy would “leap,” or “run,” if he had the chance, and praise God, for had not he as good a right to do so now as that cripple had then—he that was never a cripple and never was lame?—or that he had got something more than lame legs cured, his never-dying soul saved? He ought, he thought, to *leap four feet to his two*. “It was Peter who took the lame man by the hand; but it was the Lord who gave him strength in his ankle-bones, that made him run and leap. He did not praise Peter, he praised the dear Lord; and so would I. It is before the Lord we should leap

and dance and shout. Satan has his *merry-men*,<sup>2</sup> and they do more wickedness by their actions than by what they say, for actions speak louder than words. Now I am a *merry-man* for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the best Master, and gives the best wages. The devil gives sorrow for joy; but the Lord gives joy instead of sorrow, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of *praise* for the spirit of heaviness.”

And is all this to be denounced by men of the world, or by Christians of different temperament, as “foolish extravagance?” Was it not predicted that “the lame man should leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing?” Billy could not understand how any could be *dumb* who were “born of the Spirit.” They needed at least to pray, “Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.” It seemed natural, at any rate, for him to sing and shout, to leap and dance, and, if we may use the word, to *caper* for joy, for he seemed as free from care, as frolicsome, as gay, as gladsome, as a young lamb dancing in the meadow, or goat upon the mountain crag. His joy was always fresh and pure, exultant and full, even to overflowing. “It is a poor spectacle,” he would say, “when we have nothing but the *telling* part of the love of Christ; it is the *feeling* part that makes us happy.” His choice friends were neither ashamed to praise the Lord in the *market* nor in the *great congregation*. Many a long journey, either alone or with such companions—“birds of a feather,” was his expression—has he taken, and praised the Lord all the way. He could say with the poet

“Winter nights and summer days  
Are far too short to sing His praise.”

I remember taking a walk with him early one morning, when his conversation was of heaven. He stopped, as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him. He remained silent for a moment with uplifted eyes, which almost immediately filled with tears; a “Praise the Lord!” escaped his lips, and he bounded away, though an old man, like a hart or deer. When I came up to him he was praising the Lord aloud, as if it was the business of his life, and said: “My dear brother, if I only lived to my privilege, I should not feel the ground over which I walk.”

At a district meeting held at Hicks Mill, in 1866, Mr. Oliver, in describing the triumphant death of a woman, said she died shouting Victory. This touched Billy’s heart, and he shouted, “Glory! If a *dying* woman praised the Lord, I should think a *living* man might.”

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<sup>2</sup> A buffoon, a merry-andrew.

He would commonly address his fellow-Christians thus: "You praise God, and I will praise God, and we will both praise God together;" or, "You be the parson, and I'll be the clerk; you say, 'Praise the Lord,' and say, 'Amen!' or I'll be the parson, and you shall be the clerk; I'll say, 'Praise the Lord,' and you say, 'Amen.'" If you did not join him in praising God; for he would always at once begin, he thought you were *dead*; "for is not," said he, "the Lord worthy to be praised from the rising to the setting of the sun? And yet you will not praise Him at all." But he determined if all other tongues were silent, that his should sing God's praise if all other harps were hung upon the willows, that his should make the sweetest music; and if all other hearts were dull and cold and hard, his should glow and flame with the fervour of devotion. He rightly thought that a *young prince of forty years of age*, as he used often to term himself, had abundant reason to rejoice. He was an adopted son of God, the "King of kings," and therefore he was a prince already possessing royal rights and privileges, and for him he exulted to think his Heavenly Father had reserved everlasting glory and blessedness.

I went with him one day to see a dying saint, whose character had been unblemished for many years, but whose natural disposition was modest and retiring almost to a fault. His face wore a look of ineffable dignity and repose, lit up with a strange, unearthly radiance and glory. He was just on the verge of heaven. He could only speak in a whisper. He said: "I wish I had a voice, so that I might praise the Lord!" "You should have praised Him, my brother, when you had one," was Billy's quiet, but slightly satirical comment.

Billy's life was an almost perfect exemplification of the threefold injunction: "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks." A Christian might be *poor*, but it was his duty to "rejoice evermore;" afflicted, but still he must "rejoice evermore;" *tempted* and *tried* and *persecuted*, but he must, notwithstanding, "rejoice evermore;" and surely this is divine heavenly wisdom, true Christian philosophy. Is there not a special blessing for the poor? Are they not often "rich in faith?" and has not God chosen them "heirs of the kingdom?" Ought not they then to rejoice? We all know that *affliction* is not "joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. It is a *proof* of our Father's special love, and what is sufficient, if that is not, to cause us to rejoice? And we are expressly told that we are "to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations." So did Billy Bray. He could smile through his tears. The sickness of a child, the death of a wife, were powerless to silence his voice, or to repress his joy. It is said that when his wife died he was so overpowered with the thought of his "dear Joey" having escaped from earth's toils and sufferings to the rest and bliss of heaven, that he began to jump and dance about the room, exclaiming: "Bless the Lord!

My dear Joey is gone up with the bright ones! My dear Joey is gone up with the shining angels! Glory! Glory! Glory!” “Here,” he would say, “we have a *little bitter*, but it mixed with a *great deal of sweet*.” Mr. C. G. Honor, Primitive Methodist minister, says that at a love-feast in their chapel at St. Blazey, when Billy was present, several persons spoke of their trials, but said that their blessings more than counterbalanced them. At length Billy rose; clapping his hands and smiling, he said: “Well, friends, I have been taking vinegar and honey, but, praise the Lord, I’ve had the vinegar with a *spoon*, and the honey with a *ladle!*” He had trials as others, but “it was not worthwhile to speak or write anything about them.” Was he not on the road to heaven, and why should not he praise God *every step* of the way? “I would rather *walk* to heaven,” he has said, “than *ride* to hell even in a line carriage.” But it excites a smile to hear him speak “of showing persons *how* we shall walk the golden streets in heaven, and with *golden slippers*, too.” The death-chamber of many a “godly and devout” believer has been filled with his praises. Blessed use he has made of this incident in the life of the Rev. John Fletcher. Mrs. F. says: “On Wednesday he told me he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of those words, *God is love*, as he could never be able to express. It fills my heart,” said he, “every moment. O Polly, my dear Polly, *God is love!* Shout! shout aloud! I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth”” Billy nearly always expressed a wish when he visited the sick and dying, that he might “see them in heaven, dressed in robes of glorious brightness; for,” he would add, in his quietest vein of humour, “if I saw them there, *I must be there myself, too*. They say that every man has got a little self, and so have I too; for

‘I long to be there, His glory to share,  
And to lean on Jesus’ breast.’”

If people said he praised God too “*loud*,” he would point heavenward and say: “Up there, we shall praise Him more sweet, more *loud*;” and sometimes, “If the Lord were to stop my breath this moment” (sudden death he used to call the fields’ way to heaven), “I should be with Him in heaven at once. *I have heaven while going to heaven.*”

“The men of grace have found glory begun below.”

If any man could sing,

“Heaven is my home,”

it was Billy Bray. He said to a young friend on going to bed one night: “If you find me dead in the morning, mind you shout hallelujah!” She told him she did not think it likely she should. “Why not?” he asked. “You might, for

it would be all right” Blessed, blessed experience this! To be able to say truthfully, confidently, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” is certainly the highest privilege of men here; and this Billy could say always.

We may fitly close this chapter by the relation of two or three little incidents which illustrate the man and his character more fully than the most elaborate description could do.

In a friend’s house, in Falmouth, he exhorted those present to praise the Lord. Speaking of himself, he said: “I can’t help praising the Lord. As I go along the street I lift up one foot, and it seems to say, ‘Glory!’ and I lift up the other, and it seems to say ‘Amen;’ and so they keep on like that all the time I am walking.”

Calling at a friend’s house at a time when he had two or three visitors, he received a hearty welcome to remain and dine with them. He soon began to praise the Lord, which was as natural to him as for the birds to sing. He was asked if it was not possible for a man to get in the habit of praising the Lord without knowing what he was saying. He very coolly said *that he did not think the Lord was much troubled with that class of persons.*

On one occasion, when in the Penzance Circuit on special work, he slept with T. A. Very early in the morning Billy was out of bed, jumping, dancing, and singing the praises of God as usual. T. A. said: “Billy, why are you out thus so early? You will disturb the family, and perhaps give offence.” The next moment Billy was again leaping and praising the Lord, and then, naming the members of the household and T. A., said: “They might lie and sleep and let their wheels get rusty if they liked, but he would see to it that his wheels were kept nicely oiled and ready for work!” Then he fell on his knees and prayed aloud for the master and the mistress of the house and the members of the family, while his prayer for T. A. was that the “*Lord would have mercy on him, and make him a better man than he appears to be.*”

When Mr. Gilbert was in the St. Austell Circuit the first time Billy came to the anniversary of Tywardreath Highway Chapel. The chapel was so full that, when he came to the door, it was with difficulty he could get in; but he had no sooner uttered, in his own peculiar tone, the words, “Bless the Lord! little Billy Bray is come once more to Highway,” than, as if by magic, a passage was made for him through the crowded audience. On reaching the pulpit he began to dance and shout because “little Billy Bray was again at Highway.” He read the first line of the hymn beginning—

“Oh for a thousand tongues to sing,”

and then said: “Just think, *that’s nine hundred and ninety-nine more than I have got.*” Mr. Gilbert says that he spent an hour or two with him in the evening. “I told him that I had seen his mother at Twelveheads, and that I found her in a very blessed frame of mind, and that whilst I was praying

with her she became so happy that, although quite blind, she jumped and danced about the house, shouting the praises of God! Billy at once became much excited, and, rising from his chair, began to dance also. He then said: Dear old soul! dance, did she? I am glad to hear that. Bless the Lord! Well, I dance sometimes. Why shouldn't I dance as well as David? David, you say, was a king; well, bless the Lord! I am a King's Son! I have as good a right to dance as David had. Bless the Lord! I get very happy at times; my soul gets full of the glory, and then I dance too! I was home in my chamber t'other day, and I got so happy that I danced, and the glory came streaming down upon my soul, and it made me dance so lustily that my heels went down through the planchen."

Mr. Gilbert adds: "When Billy was about to leave, in company with a youth who had come with him, he said, 'Johnny and I, we'll make the valleys ring with our singing and praising as we go home!' I said, 'Then you are a singer, Billy.' 'Oh yes, bless the Lord! I can sing. Heavenly Father likes to hear *me* sing. I can't sing so sweetly as some; but my Father likes to hear me sing as well as those who sing better than I can. My Father likes to hear the *crow* as well as the *nightingale*, for He made them both."

Mr. Robins informs me that at a chapel anniversary he said at one time: "I went in to Truro, to buy a frock for the little maid, and coming home I felt very happy, and got catching up my heels a little bit, and I danced the frock out of the basket. When I came home Joey said, William, where's the frock?' I said, I don't know, "es-en-a" in the basket?' 'No,' said Joey. Glory be to God,' I said, 'I danced the frock out of the basket.' The next morning I went to the class-meeting, and one was speaking of his trials, and another was speaking of his trials, and I said I've got trials too, for yesterday I went into Truro, and bought a frock for the little maid. Coming home I got catching up my heels a little bit, and I danced the frock out of the basket. So they gave me the money I had paid for the frock, and two or three days afterwards someone picked up the frock and brought it to me; so I had two frocks for one. Glory!" and he closed his narration with one of his favourite sayings when persons opposed and persecuted him for singing and shouting so much, "If they were to put me into a barrel, *I would shout glory through the bung-hole!* Praise the Lord!"

The Rev. S. W. Christophers says that "the first time he saw and heard Billy, among other things he said was this: 'If Billy gets work; he praises the Lord; when he gets none, he sings all the same. Do'e think that *He*'ll starve Billy? No, no, there's sure to be a bit of flour in the bottom of the barrel for Billy. I can trust in Jesus, and while I trust im, *He*'d as soon starve Michael the Archangel as *He*'d starve Billy!'

"The next time I heard that voice was when, to all human appearance, I was about to depart from this mortal life. The hallowed stillness of my bed-

room was then broken by the distant sound of the well-known Hallelujah and then the jubilant tones of the faithful soul as he mounted the stairs singing:

‘There, there, at His feet we shall suddenly meet,  
And be parted in body no more!  
We shall sing to our lyres, with the heavenly choirs,  
And our Saviour in glory adore!’

“I was raised up to see and hear Billy again, many many times.

“I remember somebody saying to him as he sat at a friend’s table: ‘How long should I pray at a time to keep my soul healthy?’ ‘Do’ e see that there piece of brass?’ replied he, pointing to a polished ornament on the chimney-piece. ‘If you give that five minutes rub every now and then you’ll keep it bright; but if you let ‘im go a long time without it, you will have a long rub to get ‘im bright again,’”