

BROWNLOW NORTH:

THE STORY

OF

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY THE REV.

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I.

BROWNLOW NORTH'S EARLIER YEARS.

“I loved Thee late, though early I well knew
From saintly mother what to Thee was due.

* * * *

“I loved Thee late, Lord, after shameful years
Of strife, waged hard between desires and fears:
Thy word now checked me; now my will gave rein
To lusts that drew me deep in vice again.
O patience wonderful! Thou didst not hate
The lingering heart of him who loved Thee late.”

PROF. BLACKBURN ON ST. AUGUSTINE.

BROWNLOW NORTH is a name that has become a household word throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, and also in many of the cities and towns of England and Ireland. It is a name which will be held in grateful remembrance and esteem by a large portion of the present generation of Scottish Christian people, as that of a man who has influenced, by his preaching and teaching, the spiritual life of our land more than most have done. It seems therefore unfitting that such a man's life should be allowed to become a thing of the past without some permanent record being preserved of those labours in which he was so unwearied, of that teaching which made such a deep impression upon multitudes, and of that evangelistic ministry which has formed one of the most important factors of the religious, as distinguished from the ecclesiastical, history of Scotland in the present generation.

Brownlow North was born on the 6th January, 1810. He was the only son of the Rev. Charles Augustus North, Rector of Alverstoke, Hants, and Prebendary of Winchester, and of Rachel, daughter of Thomas Jarvis, Esq., of Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire. His grandfather was the Hon. and Rev. Brownlow North, D.D., Prelate of the Noble Order of the Garter, who was successively the Bishop of the sees of Lichfield, Worcester, and Winchester. Mr. North was thus a grand-nephew of Lord North, the celebrated prime minister of George III., not a little of whose characteristic ability and genius, along with that of other members of the distinguished family to which he belonged, reappeared in him. It is a family which has produced members who have exercised an appreciable influence on the community both in Church and State.

His birth took place at Winchester House, Chelsea, the town house of his grandfather. His father was the Bishop's youngest son; but as his cousin, the Earl of Guilford, had no son, and his elder brother Francis had been long married, and was also childless, the infant boy was welcomed as heir to the

earldom; and hearty were the cheers which greeted him, when his father's intimate companion and friend, Christian Schetky, the well-known marine painter,¹ receiving him from the nurse's arms at breakfast, presented him to the company as the future Earl of Guilford. It was these expectations which prevented his being trained for any of the professions, and which thus, as in many similar cases, eventually proved a serious disadvantage to him.

The little boy throve apace, and a story which is told of him when he was five years old, gives evidence of his natural quickness of mind. Walking with his aunt, Lady Lucy North, in the park where the deer were lying lazily basking and browsing, he said to her, after some minutes' silence, "Aunt Lucy, why are you like that big stag there?" "I'm sure I can't tell," replied his aunt. "I don't think I'm a bit like. Tell me why." "Because, Aunt Lucy, you're a great *dear*." To dive to the depths of a long pocket, and extract half-a-crown, was the quick rejoinder of his aunt to his *jeu de mot*; and afterwards, with much praise of his cleverness and affection, she related the story as it has since been preserved in the family.

At the early age of nine he went to Eton, when Dr. Keats was headmaster, and remained there six years, in Dr. Hawtrey's house. He did not distinguish himself there by application to his books, but was known as a first-rate swimmer and general good fellow by the sobriquet of Gentleman Jack, in contradistinction to a bargee of his name, with whom the Eton boys of that time were familiar. The prayers and pious training of his mother, who was a most godly woman, bore as yet no fruit in the wild and wayward character of her boy, who was strongly averse to all that was good, his influence upon his schoolfellows being exactly the reverse of what she would have desired. His father dying in 1825, young Brownlow was removed from Eton, and went out to Corfu with his cousin, Lord Guilford, who was Chancellor of the Ionian Islands, where he had founded a Theological College, in which it was hoped his young relative might be induced to continue his studies. Nothing, however, seemed able to subdue the wild, high spirits of the lad; and the old gentleman, after finding one day that the window of his class-room had been made the winning-post and last jump of an amateur steeplechase, which Brownlow had got up, regretfully sent him home again, as beyond his control. He was then sent abroad with a tutor, to make, as it was then termed, the grand tour; but this experiment proved no more fortunate than the preceding, for meeting with his tutor in a gaming saloon the first night after their arrival in Paris, he insisted, under penalty of exposure, that all the books

¹ Schetky when a young man in Rome received the blessing of Cardinal York, the brother of Prince Charles Stuart, and died within a year of Brownlow North's death, at the age of ninety-six. That interview was thus one between two men who were respectively contemporaries of the battle of Culloden and the death of David Livingstone.

they had brought with them should be left behind in Paris, as unnecessary encumbrances, and afterwards, on the journey to Rome, he won from the miserable tutor at *ecarté* all the money with which he had been entrusted to defray the expenses of the tour, so that their position became completely reversed; the pupil was now master, and the tutor only tolerated as a useful and humble companion.²

On returning from the Continent he joined his mother, who had gone to live at Cheltenham. Here for a time he thoroughly enjoyed himself; for he was at that age, seventeen, very fond of dancing and riding, and both pleasures were here to his hand in perfection. So great an impression did he make upon his fair partners, that he proposed to no less than nineteen in one winter, and was accepted by them all! His fond mother had at first considerable difficulty, and felt no little embarrassment in satisfying the expectant mothers-in-law of a future earl that her son was quite a boy, and that nothing serious could be entertained; but after the experience of a few similar situations her replies almost formulated themselves, and it was with difficulty at last that she could refrain from yielding to a strong desire to laugh at the extraordinary absurdity of the whole affair.

His propensity for riding, which developed itself in racing up and down the promenade, a long straight boulevard, which those who know Cheltenham will recollect, had well-nigh brought him to his end, had not a merciful Providence watched over him and interfered to save his life. He was racing with one of his companions, and had just been successful, when his rival challenged him again to another contest, but stipulated they should change sides of the road, owing to some fancied advantage the right side possessed over the left. It was agreed to, and they started at full speed, when, unfortunately, coming down the hill round the corner where now stands the Queen's Hotel, there appeared a travelling carriage and pair of posters. To avoid a collision was impossible, and the horse and rider on the right-hand side went straight into the body of the carriage. The rider was thrown over the top, and taken up senseless, and afterwards died; the horse was so injured that it had to be immediately destroyed. This melancholy event made Cheltenham no longer agreeable to young North; and as he had made the acquaintance during the winter of several Irish families who had come there for the season, and who had pressed him to go and see them in Ireland in the summer, and as he was intimate with some of the officers of the regiment then quartered at Galway, he determined to cross the Channel, and try the attractions of the Emerald Isle. These proved too much for him; for the

² It may be mentioned as not unworthy to rank along with other remarkable instances of Divine grace recorded in this volume, that this tutor, who must have had such a bad influence upon his pupil, at a later period gave every evidence of true penitence, and of being renewed in Christ Jesus.

daughter of a highly-esteemed Protestant clergyman so captivated him, that he induced her to give him her hand, and was married to Grace Anne, second daughter of the Rev. Thomas Coffey, D.D., of Galway, on the 12th of December, 1828, before he had completed his nineteenth year. On the 12th of December, 1878, Mr. North would have completed fifty years of wedded life, and those who knew him may remember how he looked forward to celebrating his “golden” wedding. The issue of his marriage was three sons, Charles Augustus, Brownlow who predeceased his father by a short interval, and Frederic who died in early childhood.

About this period however, great, and to him most important, changes had taken place in the circle of his relations. His kind old friend and cousin had died, and had been succeeded in the earldom by his uncle Francis, his father’s eldest brother. Naturally an austere man, he had no sympathy with the youthful extravagances of his nephew, and when the death of his wife took place, after nearly thirty years of wedded life, he told him he should marry again. He was as good as his word, and marrying a lady some twenty-five years his junior, he became the father of a family, and though his eldest son did not live to succeed him, his grandson now perpetuates the name, Dudley Francis, 7th Earl of Guilford.

His expectations being thus doomed to disappointment, and his young wife having borne him two sons, the question as to the maintenance of himself and them asserted itself persistently and painfully. His sole income was derived from his fees as registrar of the diocese of Winchester and Surrey, to which office he had been appointed when quite young by his grandfather, the Bishop. His work was done by two local solicitors, who paid him a yearly allowance, and retained the balance of the fees for their services. At that time he was in receipt of about £300 per annum,³ a sum quite insufficient for his habits; so to improve his finances he had recourse to the gaming-table, with such bad success that he lost a much larger sum than he could possibly pay; upon which he left England for Boulogne, taking his wife and children with him. Here again for some time he amused himself as before; but finding his funds running low, and wishing for fresh excitement, he sent his wife and children home to his mother, and started off himself as a volunteer for Don Pedro’s army in Portugal. His mother received his wife and her two children, adopted the eldest, who was called Charles Augustus after her husband. Mrs. North then returned for a time to her old home in Ireland. After an interval of several months, Don Pedro’s affair being settled, the prodigal returned home, to be forgiven; and in the summer of 1835 we find him going down to Scotland with his brother-in-law, Mr. Hayward, who

³ The very moderate remuneration derived from this post was all that he ever inherited in the way of means, a fact which it is right to state, as many had the erroneous idea that he was possessed of a considerable private fortune, and judged him by this mistaken standard.

had taken Abergeldie Castle for the shooting for that year. His wife and two younger children accompanied him; and from that time till his death, with only one interval of any importance, Scotland was the land of his adoption, in it was the home of his choice. Thus, though an Englishman by birth and education, he became almost a naturalised Scotchman, and was greatly attached to the country, and thoroughly conversant with the habits of thought of the people, whom he was destined afterwards to move so deeply and widely to concern about their eternal interests. But as yet his own thoughts and pursuits were running in wholly different channels.

For the greater part of the next four years Brownlow North remained in Aberdeenshire, taking a shooting during the season, and wintering in Aberdeen. It was then that he made his match with Captain Barclay of Ury, to see whom he had ridden over from Aberdeen, in so short a space of time, as he said, that the captain declared it impossible. "Do you call that impossible?" said Mr. North; "I will engage to ride from Aberdeen to Huntly and back at the same rate, that is, eighty miles in eight hours." Captain Barclay replied, "I still say it is impossible; and I will make you a wager of £50 you can't do it." North at once accepted the bet, and the match was settled to come off as soon as could be conveniently arranged. Of course in Aberdeen the coming event was freely talked over, the opinion being pretty general that Mr. North had overrated his own powers and those of the Aberdeen horses. So much so, that at a dinner shortly previous to the match, a young barrister said he was a fool for attempting it, and had much better pay forfeit. "A fool you think me!" Mr. North rejoined: "so far do I differ from your opinion, that I will back myself not only to win my match with Captain Barclay, but to do the same feat over again the next day, and win my match with you." The company were astonished; the second match was made. Mr. North rode the eighty miles on three Aberdeen hacks, in hard snow and frost, danced all night at a ball afterwards, and rode and won the second match the following day.

There was another story told about him when shooting over the Huntly moors. Application was made to him one day by a young fellow, half-poacher, half-shepherd, to be allowed to go out with him on the hill, as he had heard that he was a most "tremendous" walker, and that he could find no person who could walk with him, and he should like to try himself what he could do. Mr. North said, "Very well. Meet me tomorrow morning, and I shall be glad of your company for the day." The man came, and walked from six in the morning till sundown. Mr. North never used to rest for luncheon then. He came the next day, and the third day, when, after a bad day's sport, birds being wild and scarce, on the road home a covey of grouse rose at the foot of a hill, and flew some way up the side of it. Turning to his companion, Mr. North said, "I shall have a try after those fellows." The man looked at

him saw that he was going, sat down on a stone, and cried like a child. He was beat. He never came out any more. Mr. North certainly was a most untiring sportsman in those days. Every day and all day was his motto, and though never quite in the class of first-rate shots, he was a very good one, and long had a challenge unaccepted, to shoot a match for a month against any man, over two brace of dogs with one gun. One season, in Glenbucket, in six weeks he killed over nine hundred and seventy brace of grouse to his own gun.

It must not be imagined that throughout the course of his gay, pleasure-seeking; and ungodly youth he had no upbraidings of conscience, no strivings of the Holy Spirit, and no seasons when he resolved to forsake living for self and sin, and to seek the Lord. On the contrary, like most persons who have been trained to pray at a mother's knee, he was, during his early life, occasionally the subject of deep religious impressions. In his childhood his mind had been stored by her with Divine truth, so that even at an early age he had a correct knowledge of the leading truths of the Gospel of Christ; and this, although long overlaid and apparently dead as well as buried, was yet to spring up in due time, and bring forth much fruit, so that she who sowed, and he who reaped, rejoiced together. These impressions more than once awakened in the bosom of Christian friends the hope that he was yielding himself to the Spirit's teaching, and the Saviour's gracious sway. But, alas! his good resolutions proved but as flaxen cords or green withes to bind the Samson-like force of his old nature; and when temptation came upon him, they were broken as a thread of tow at the touch of the fire, and all his professions and fair promise of amendment turned out, although not insincere at the time, to be as the morning cloud, or the early dew that goeth away. They were fair, but fading and fruitless.

The cause of the deepest religious impression with which he was visited previous to his awakening and conversion, was a conversation which the late eminently godly Duchess of Gordon had with him at her dinner-table at Huntly Lodge in the year 1839.

The following account of this incident was given by her Grace to her friend and pastor, the Rev. H. M. Williamson: "Mr. North was staying in Huntly, engaged in shooting, and utterly careless and ungodly. Some friends of his wrote to me, asking me to take some notice of him, with the view of withdrawing him from his evil ways and companionships. I promised to do so, and gave him an invitation to dinner. When we were at dinner, he sat beside me, and suddenly said to me with much gravity, 'Duchess, what should a man do who has often prayed to God and never been answered?' I lifted up my heart to God to teach me what to say. I looked him quietly in the face, and said, so as not to be overheard by others, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts' (James iv. 3).

His countenance changed, he became very greatly moved, was very quiet during the evening, and thanked me ere he left.”

Not long after this his heart was further softened and impressed by the dangerous illness of his second son, Brownlow, to whom he was much attached, and by perusing a little book which the Duchess of Gordon had given Mrs. North to read to her sick child. So deep and apparently hopeful was this impression, that he determined to change entirely his mode of life, study at Oxford, and take a degree with a view to entering the English Church. Those who have followed Mr. North’s career hitherto can imagine what force of character, what energy and perseverance it required to undertake and carry out such a programme. And as far as depended upon himself he did so. He came to Cheltenham, consulted with his friend Frederic Robertson (afterwards of Brighton), who was at that time an undergraduate at Oxford, and by his advice matriculated at Magdalen Hall as a Gentleman Commoner. He actually had forgotten his Greek alphabet when he began his self-imposed task; but such was the power of his memory, so great his capacity for application, coupled with no ordinary natural talent, that he passed both his “little go” and “great go” examinations with credit, and his Tutor, Dr. Jacobson, the present Bishop of Chester, gave it as his opinion that had he entered into the honour schools, and read for them, with the powers he had shown he would have taken a fair class. He took his degree in 1842.

Among his contemporaries at Oxford was the present Primate of England, who in Brownlow North’s later years, when he was preaching as an evangelist in London, received him at Lambeth Palace, and had pleasure in recalling with him their old college days. For a considerable time after entering Oxford he corresponded regularly with the Duchess of Gordon, who had also written to some of her friends to look after him there. His life during his residence at Oxford was most exemplary; but when he was almost ready for ordination, and had got the promise of a curacy at Olney, the Bishop of Lincoln was made acquainted by an anonymous letter with some of the excesses of his early years. Though this might have delayed his ordination, Brownlow North seems to have felt, when it was fairly put to him, that the present state of his heart also rendered him unfit for the holy office of the ministry; for he afterwards told his friend the Duchess of Gordon that at a private interview the Bishop said to him, “Mr. North, if I were in your position, and you in mine, would you ordain me?” to which he candidly replied, “My Lord, I would not.”

In answer to some interrogations from Mr. Williamson then minister of the Free Church, Huntly, now of Belfast, Mr. North said, that at this time he had been truly and thoroughly awakened, that he had a horrible sense of the demerit of his sins, and of the wrath of God justly due to them, and really purposed to depart from them and turn to God, and did so for a time in

outward act. But, he added, "I never apprehended Christ, I never accepted Him as my sin-bearer and my righteousness."

To a Christian lady, a very old friend of his, Miss Gordon, senior, of Wardhouse, who knew him intimately both before and after his conversion, he said, when questioned by her concerning this period of awakening, and apparently hopeful impression, which took place after she knew him: "The house was swept and garnished, but *empty*; and the last state of that man was worse than the first. Think of the love of Jesus in coming to me after that!"

While he did not enter the Church as he intended to do on going to Oxford, the course of studies which he pursued with that view proved eventually of the greatest advantage to him as a mental discipline, and as furnishing him with that acquaintance with the evidences of revealed religion which he afterwards displayed, as well as with the other branches of an Arts curriculum. It also enabled the Free Church of Scotland, without departing widely from her ordinary procedure, to recognize him publicly as a preacher of the gospel.

We have recounted thus fully the sad history of this period of spiritual impression, of good resolutions, and temporary reformation, to which Mr. North freely referred in private to his friends, not to lead any to think lightly of the great sin of grieving the Spirit of God, but while warning them of the danger of so doing, duly to magnify the greatness of that Divine grace which afterwards laid hold on one who had so grievously resisted His strivings, and had so backslidden when he was almost within the kingdom. There is also a close connection between his own experience at this period and his subsequent religious history and public teaching. It also to some extent explains, taken along with his mother's training, how it was that he possessed such a full and clear knowledge of the way of salvation, and the main truths of Scripture, as to be able within about a year of his saving change to address meetings, without falling into any doctrinal errors which he might afterwards have had to retract.

After this he threw himself openly into his old life of pleasure and of sin. He forgot God days without number, and wished that God would forget him. In 1845 he again took moors in Scotland, this time in Inverness-shire, when he resided at Glen Spean for three years—afterwards at Dalmally in Argyleshire, when his second son Brownlow married Miss McDonald Macalister, of Inistrynich. Mr. North lived to see them both die before him, and it is in her grave that his body now rests. In 1850 he took Dallas moors, and made that house his residence. His influence and example upon his friends and associates, and upon the whole neighbourhood of his residence, was very pernicious. To a large extent he cast off even that form of godliness which many worldly and ungodly persons retain out of deference to the feelings of the religious portion of the community. The Rev. W. Bathgate,

Congregational minister at Forres, when he saw the streets thronged with eager crowds going to hear Brownlow North preach, said to a friend, that he could not but recall the Sabbath mornings when at the same hour as the worshippers were flocking to the house of God, he had seen him drive in his dog-cart through these streets, with rod and basket slung behind him, going to spend the day in fishing on the river Findhorn. In his public addresses he acknowledged to the full the evil of his course of pleasure-seeking, irreligion, folly, and vice.

At the same time he was not without some good points in his character. He is spoken of by one who knew him at that time as generous towards cases of distress, and this natural kindliness of character and generosity of disposition remained with him to the end.

Another beautiful trait in his character was his devoted love to his mother, who, as we have seen, was a very earnest Christian, and this was so marked as to sustain hope of his conversion in the heart of at least one of his friends. He was also very candid and honest, and far removed from making any profession which was not thoroughly genuine. A Christian friend of his having heard an impressive sermon on the words, "Let me die the death of the righteous," at once thought of Mr. North, whose conversion she had much at heart, and on reaching home wrote down portions of the sermon, which she thought might prove of use to him, and with earnest prayer sent them to him while he was visiting worldly acquaintances in the Highlands. Mr. North's answer soon came back, and so far as she can recall it was, "To die the death of the righteous we must live the life of the righteous, dear Auntie, and I am not prepared for that yet."

While quite careless as to religion he so far had a reverence for its claims, that he has stated in public that "there never was an hour in his life, so far as he knew, when he would have remained in the same room with a man who was talking open infidelity and blasphemy."

At this time, then, he had deliberately rejected the great salvation, and as he afterwards confessed before multitudes of awe-struck listeners, he had virtually said to God, "I must have my sins: I know the consequences, but I accept them; I accept damnation as my portion." And the Lord had been just in judging, if He had taken him at his word.

Thus spending his time in after-dinner revelry, midnight play, and the other pursuits of what is known as "*fast life*," he continued to live till the autumn of 1854, when he was nearly forty-five years of age.