

BROWNLOW NORTH:

THE STORY

OF

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY THE REV.

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MOFFAT.

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X.

WORK IN IRELAND AND IN LONDON.

“Blest by our heavenly Father’s hand
Were thy deep love and tender care,
Thy ministry and fervent prayer,
 To those who drew
By thousands round thee, in the hour
 Of prayerful waiting, hushed and deep,
And those who first, rejoicing, heard
Through thee the Gospel’s glorious word,
 Seals of thy true apostleship.” WHITTIER.

IN the early part of 1859, that remarkable work of grace broke out in the North of Ireland, which must ever rank as one of the most notable Revivals of modern times. It had been preceded by the great American Revival of 1858, and was succeeded by the Revival in Scotland of 1860. Indeed, the latter awakening may be said to have spread to us from Ulster by a kind of spiritual sympathy or contagion; for, as the late Professor Miller remarked, when he announced in our house the first news of its having touched the Scottish shores, it came just in the track that cholera would have come, crossing the Channel at its narrowest point, and appearing first on the coast of Ayrshire, from which on a clear day a keen eye can descry the outline of the hills of Antrim.

This fact does not reduce that remarkable awakening to a mere epidemic, though it was accompanied by physical phenomena; for there are sympathies that are spiritual and mental, that communicate themselves from soul to soul under the Divine direction, even as those do that are physical. There are sympathies that compact nations together as well as families; and just as a work of grace in a family or a congregation often affects the whole members, and will do so always, unless resistance be offered to it, so no reason can be adduced why the same law of moral and spiritual susceptibility should not influence whole nations. The counties of Ayr and Renfrew, where the revival began in Scotland, were not only connected with the sister Isle by proximity, but were even more closely associated with her by the ties of race and of intercourse, the ports of Greenock and Ardrossan being the two chief outlets for passenger traffic between Scotland and the north of Ireland.

Mr. North’s work in Scotland during the previous three years had prepared the way for the general wave of revival which in 1860 burst upon our land. Indeed, the springtide of blessing under his ministry, as attested by the letters of thanksgiving sent to him, reached its highest point in 1858 and 1859, and was therefore independent of the revivals in Ireland and America. It served at the same time as a providential preparation for

the advent of that general awakening here, which in all human likelihood might otherwise have had as slight and partial effect upon Scotland as it had upon England and the Scottish Highlands; for in neither of these parts of the island had there been such deep ploughing of the soil of men's hearts which in the Scottish Lowlands had been stirred to its depths with the ploughshare of conviction under this Baptist-like preacher of Repentance.

When the news of the wonderful awakening in Ulster reached this land, many of our most experienced and godly ministers crossed over to witness with their own eyes this remarkable movement among a people sprung from our own, to form a judgment at first-hand as to whether it was genuine or spurious, to render what assistance they could to the over-wrought ministers there, and to seek to receive for themselves, and carry home to their flocks, a new baptism of spiritual life.

The following recollections of Mr. North's visit to Ireland are from the pen of his beloved friend, James Balfour, Esq., of Edinburgh:—

“It was my privilege to accompany Mr. North to Ireland at the time of the revival of 1859. We sailed from Greenock on a fine summer evening, and paced the deck together most of the night, as we steamed down the Clyde; the water and the surrounding mountains being purpled by the fading light far into the night, and the coast of Ireland brightened, as we approached it, by the early dawn. I remember a little incident that happened at Greenock just before we left. We had gone into a small bookseller's shop to buy a newspaper, and he pointed out to me a copy of the Revival and a cheap irreligious magazine lying side by side, saying, ‘What two books to be together!’ The shopman interfered, and said, ‘You are talking, sir, about what you know nothing of.’ ‘How so?’ said Mr. North. ‘Because you never read these books.’ ‘Yes, I have.’ ‘Have you read the magazine?’ ‘Yes, I have; I read it for many years. It is very clever, but very wicked. I am a changed man since then.’ ‘I know best what will sell,’ replied the shopkeeper. ‘Oh, yes, if you are living only for this world; but remember you are immortal.’ In leaving the shop, he gave him his own tract with that title, ‘You are Immortal.’

“In Ireland we were witnesses together of the physical prostration that were the accompaniments of the revival there. Mr. North did not pretend either to explain them or to understand them; but he used to say, ‘Either they are of the devil, or of man, or of God. They cannot be of the devil, for he never makes men anxious about their souls, or desirous of flying to God. They cannot be of man, for he cannot do it if he would. If he could, he oftener would. Then it must be of God.’

“After staying a while in Ulster, we went to Dublin, and attended a meeting of the Irish General Assembly, and listened together for some

hours to the ministers in private conference, telling the wondrous and thrilling stories of redeeming love in their various parishes, till every eye was moistened and every heart was swelling under the conscious influence of the Holy Ghost. Mr. North on a subsequent day addressed the Assembly, and was received with deep respect, and listened to amid profound silence.”

Before leaving Scotland, Mr. North had received a communication from the Moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church, the Rev. John Johnstone, of Tullylish, informing him of the very interesting movement that was taking place within their bounds, and inviting him to cross the Channel and address their Assembly, which was to meet in Dublin; and it was in accordance with this request that he repaired thither. Mr. Johnstone had been present in the General Assembly of the Free Church in the month of May, when Mr. North was formally commissioned as an evangelist, and he thought that a visit from one so honoured in the work would be beneficial both to the ministers and the congregations of his own Church.

In 1863 Mr. North again addressed their General Assembly, which conveyed to him a formal resolution of their thanks and sympathy.

Some years later, in 1867, Mr. North also addressed the Synod of the English Presbyterian Church at Manchester, by their special request.

In the autumn of 1859, Mr. North received an invitation, through the Rev. Professor Plumer, of the Old School Presbyterian Church, Alleghany, Pa., to visit the United States, and labour for a time in their great cities, but this he never accomplished. Professor Plumer said that one of their leading Church Courts, which was about to meet, would gladly send him a formal invitation, should that be thought best.

To return to his work during his first visit to Ireland in 1859;—both before and after the meeting of the General Assembly he preached in various towns throughout Ulster, and not a few of those who were awakened under him were the subjects of physical prostration, although Mr. North was far from desiring to foster these manifestations.

In the first week of August he preached in Londonderry. The newspapers reported that between 4000 and 5000 persons of all classes assembled to hear him in the Victoria Market on Sunday, on which occasion he read and commented on the eighth chapter of Proverbs. He said that “no one would leave that assembly the same person as he entered it. As soon as man sinned he died spiritually. Death was being without God. In God was life, out of Him was no life. All that could guide a man upward left him when he sinned, and the devil took possession of him. The precise moment would come when each would die and stand face to face with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way through whom we must go back to God. We must go through the rent veil of the flesh of Jesus. Man’s wisdom only led him to

dishonour God and destroy himself. He was once staying in a house with the high and noble, when a scoffer said, 'The instinct of the brute is higher than the reason of man.' He was indignant when he heard the remark, but afterwards he reflected that the brute had the instinct as God gave it, but man had not reason as God gave it. He asked those who followed their own wisdom what hope they had, though they gained the whole world, of escaping hell, unless the Bible were a lie? What was the great conflict between God and man? It was whether man would believe his own heart or the wisdom of God. If they believed that Christ's yoke was easy, they would take it up that night. The speaker in the eighth of Proverbs was the Son of God. It was a call to the foolish and simple to turn at once from their folly. To fear God was to hate sin,—to love God was to keep His commandments. Sinners would be saved by faith, and not by their own feelings. The proof that they had received the Holy Spirit was not a sensation, but power over sin, which was their great enemy. There was one great Gospel commandment, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.' When his own spirits were low, he often relied on the words, 'Trust in the Lord *at all times.*' He urged believers to abide in Christ. A sickly-looking branch, by remaining in the tree, would become strong and vigorous. The love of Christ to men was like the Father's love to His own Son." Such is an outline of his discourse.

In the evening he preached again to an overflowing congregation, from Genesis xxiv. 38: "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." He had given an address from this text very shortly after he began his work in the autumn of 1856, in Inverness, and he has stated that he did not know that he had ever preached that sermon without hearing of blessing resulting from it. He afterwards published it in an amplified form, under the title of "Yes or No." (Hunt and Co.) On Monday evening he preached again in the first Presbyterian Church, on the Parable of the Sower (which has also been published in the form of a tract), and on Tuesday evening from Rev. iii. 14-22, the message to the Laodicean Church; and when he asked the anxious to remain to a second meeting, few left the building.

After preaching in many other localities, he left for Scotland on the 26th of August.

In Ireland he delivered about fifty addresses, many of them to several thousands of auditors. The tendency of all his teachings and exhortations was to discountenance reliance upon mere feeling, to shut men up into the faith, and to exalt and magnify the written Word. Such ministrations at such a time were eminently seasonable, and were largely blessed.

The following is part of a correspondence from the Presbyterian minister of Newtownlimavady, well known by many in Scotland, and gives an interesting account of the results of his work there.

“N’L’VADY, 17th August, 1859.

“MY DEAR MR NORTH,

“I have waited until I could report respecting the influences of your visit. I have now reason to assure you that God has greatly blessed the word you addressed to us. A number of souls have been converted, and a still greater number are blessing God that their faith in Jesus and His written Word has been greatly confirmed. I bless God that the sickly and unscriptural fervours, that were so widely spreading, have been arrested, and society breathes the purer atmosphere of simple trust in the promises of God. The Roman Catholic found peace, and has gone home to tell what God has done for his soul. During the prostration a Bible dropped from his pocket, which, he afterwards fervently pressed to his heart. A young woman on a visit from Scotland to friends in N’L’vady, began by making light of God’s work, but the morning after your last service she found peace in believing. She is praying most anxiously for Scotland, that the Lord may make it like the north of Ireland. A girl in the workhouse was sweeping the door and hearing your voice (the wind blowing that way) she distinctly heard you repeat the invitation, ‘Whosoever will, let him come.’ She staggered into the house, fell prostrate before God, and found immediate peace. I’ll keep a record of cases as they occur, and show them to you when you come back to us. The cry is, When will he come back to us again? The ground has been measured where the people stood at your last open-air service, and it has been calculated that more than 12,000 persons were present. I think we will have 20,000 when you next visit us.

“ . . . You will be glad to know that even in the heat and burden of harvest, the work of God goes on with unabated interest. I held eleven public meetings last week, taking the dinner hour, from one till two o’clock, and in the evening from seven till nine, and everywhere I went we had crowded meetings. Our people began last Lord’s day at half-past seven in the morning, pleading for the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the Sabbath school; and with the exception of their hours for breakfast, dinner, and tea, the whole day was spent in devotional exercises up to the hour of ten at night. They would not, could not part; it was a blessed season of the sweetest communion. There is hardly a meeting I hold in the country but I hear some sinner telling of mercy received, or some child of God speaking of great enlargement of heart through your services, and I invariably beg of them to prove their love to you by commending you and yours to the oversight of the Saviour. We have had several cases of conversion from Rome. We had two Roman converts with us lately: they are the finest specimens of young Christians I ever met. Oh, how different! One was like John, all love, so sweet and gentle; he had so put on Christ, that you could see nothing but Jesus: the other like Peter, all boldness and fire; he had so put on the armour of light, that he seemed as one who

could venture to do and dare anything in the name of Jesus. They openly and boldly spoke in many places in the name of Jesus, and God has blessed their appeals. Many Roman Catholics have attended, and several have resolved to leave the Church of Rome. I feel persuaded, if united prayer continue to ascend for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Romish priests and people, the papacy in Ireland will be overthrown. They are trembling; God, allwise, knew the best way to reach the blinded, bigoted, and superstitious papists. The terrific prostrations that are weekly occurring in their chapels, and the cries of the agonized for the blood of Jesus, as they fall beside their altars, are producing results (as yet) known only to God. One peculiarity of the present movement is the coming of *poor simpletons* to Jesus. John —, a creature who gathered rags, has been for eight weeks one of the most devout worshippers of the Lord, and although he confesses that he is a poor sinner, yet his hope is so fixed in Jesus, that he lives in prayer and praise. In L— meeting-house a prayer-meeting was held on Monday evening. After divine service was over, a Roman Catholic simpleton, who had travelled two miles, came forward. He was very tall, and clothed in a woman's dress. He earnestly requested that the minister and people would pray 'that he might be washed in Christ's precious blood.' Singular sight, and still more singular request! The cases of the deaf, dumb, and blind frequently occur, and, so far as I can judge, the hand of the same God is in this visitation. Doubting souls have come forth revived and comforted. In some cases, like Zacharias, the doubting were struck dumb; in other cases, like Daniel (ch. x.), it seemed to be the result of a sight of the Divine Majesty presented to the soul. Several things have been said by them whilst recovering, for which they seem truly ashamed; but Peter on the mount spoke foolishly. Oh, I wish all our ministers would give over all their wise solutions of these strange visitations, and work for God! What we don't know we'll know hereafter. Meantime, we know Jesus is the Physician for all, and His blood the balm for all.

“Yours in our own loved Lord,

“GEORGE STEEN.”

It was in the end of the same year, 1859, that Brownlow North first visited London on evangelistic work, where he was honoured to carry a light from the fire which was glowing with such intense heat in Ulster, and had already begun to communicate its light and warmth to Scotland. His intimate friend, James E. Mathieson, Esq., thus describes his work in the Metropolis, in the organizing of which he himself took a leading part.

“Mr. North, accompanied by Mr. Reginald Radcliffe, came to London at the close of 1859, to address the Young Men's Christian Association in Exeter Hall; and on 20th December, began a busy season which extended over five months. What had been intended for a brief stay became the first of a succession of prolonged visits to London, and is still felt to be memorable and

precious by many grateful hearts. It was a time of blessing. The revival of religion which a year or two before had stirred the churches of America, and had next been manifested in signal awakenings in the north of Ireland, did not leave England and Scotland unmoved.

“The thought happily suggested itself to some of Mr. North’s friends, that advantage might be taken of his presence in London to try and reach some of the upper classes during the height of the season of 1860; and for this end, Willis’ Rooms were taken for a series of services, at an hour in the afternoon likely to secure the attendance of that capricious class, ‘society.’ The first of these meetings secured an attendance which encouraged its promoters, and paved the way for gradually increasing audiences during the succeeding weeks; and towards the close of the series, not only was there a crowded gathering, but a riveted attention; it was no longer the curiosity of idlers seeking a new distraction, and asking one another, ‘What will this babbler say?’ but rather the intense, if often unexpressed, heart-longing for higher and holier life, and the sometimes uttered repetition of the old anxious cry, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ for some were found to thrust aside conventional reserve, and seek in private conversation afterwards, a solution of soul difficulties, and guidance towards deeper acquaintance with the way of peace. These after-meetings were at that time a novelty, but then, and ever after, they have been found precious seasons of opportunity for personal dealing with souls.*

“These meetings naturally brought forth invitations to take part in the services for the people, with which we are now so familiar, but which eighteen years ago were still somewhat a novelty, held in theatres and great halls in various parts of London.

“ In St. James’s Hall, Piccadilly, and in several of the theatres of the east and south of London, North was privileged again and again to deliver his testimony, and with his intense earnestness enforce the necessity of decision for Christ, and preparedness to meet God. He used sometimes to tell his hearers that he believed he was more anxious for their salvation than many among them were for themselves. Regarding the effect of these London services, I may transcribe the following letter from an honoured minister of the gospel, the Rev. Frank H. White, of Chelsea:—

“August 22nd, 1877.

“MY DEAR MR. MATHIESON,—My wife and her two sisters were awakened and brought to Christ, as you know, under Mr. North’s preaching during the St. James’s Hall services, about 1860. They had gone to hear Morley Punshon, and were told by one assisting at the services that on the following Sunday “a gentleman would preach, whom if they once heard they would

* At the close of this series of meetings a special service was appointed for anxious inquirers, which was attended by between 500 and 600 persons.

never forget.” They heard him. His text was, I believe, “Wilt thou go with this man?” They knew little, very little, if any of Bible truth, and were utterly destitute of gospel light. They were literally transfixed with terror as they listened to Mr. North’s awful description of the sinner’s state and danger. “I only remember,” says my wife, “that I felt under his preaching that there was really a heaven and hell, and that Mr. North believed in both.”

“This has always struck me about his preaching,—it was so intensely realistic. It was impossible to listen and be indifferent, it seemed as if it must either excite the bitterest opposition, or else carry the heart’s citadel as by storm, and compel to an immediate and unconditional surrender. The fact that at the time Mr. North began his testimony for Christ there was less of earnest preaching than at the present, may in some measure account for the peculiar freshness which seemed to belong to his ministry, and gave to his whole career a novelty alike startling and attractive.

“His preaching, however, had in my opinion several elements which much of the preaching of today would be the better for. He told people of the wrath to come in language, which, if strong, was not more so than was consistent with that fidelity without which a professed messenger from God can have no true claim upon another’s attention, seeing he lacks the very first essential of a herald of truth. Mr. North had what Harrington Evans avowed to be the greatest need of his time, “a deep sense of the reality of the penal judgment of God.”

“Another striking feature of his ministry was, that he addressed the *consciences* of his hearers, spoke of sin in plain terms, and insisted upon *repentance toward God*, as equally needful to an entrance into the kingdom with faith in the Lord Jesus. But what, perhaps more than anything else, made his ministry so valuable, and should move us to pray the Lord to raise up more like him, was the fact that he gave no uncertain sound upon the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ. I shall never forget his speaking on this subject in the Stafford Rooms. Taking for his text Rom. x. 4, “Christ is the end (or fulfilment) of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” he remarked, “Men in their endeavour to work out a righteousness of their own by keeping the law, generally begin *here* (pointing to the elbow of his left arm), and try to work up to the end; but they make no real progress, and only after repeated failures and falls do some see (pointing to the tip of his fingers) that *Christ* is the *end* of the law, and that in His perfect obedience alone they can be justified.”

“Yours affectionately,
FRANK H. WHITE.’

“Mr. North himself felt that the advantages he possessed as an English gentleman, with access to certain circles of society, formed part of

the gift bestowed upon him to be laid out for the Master's glory; nor did he shrink from giving his testimony in season and out of season, in mixed company as well as amongst Christian friends; at the dinner table and in the railway carriage, not less than in the pulpit or from the platform. Not often, at least in the days now referred to, was there such a fine, daring spirit evinced as when at a large dinner party North would break in upon a worldly conversation with some pointed remark which startled and silenced the majority of the company; or when in some gathering of Christian people, occupied probably with conversation about the externals of their faith, he would thrust in an inquiry which at once put away questions of churches for the more urgent and pressing question of personal salvation, or turned talk about preachers aside to make way for the claims of Christ."

As an example of this we insert the following instance which has been kindly communicated to us by Principal Brown, D.D., of Aberdeen, well-known to the English as well as the Scotch Christian public by his valuable published works. Dr. Brown happened to be paying a visit at Keith Hall along with Mr. North. At dinner a military officer, who was in the neighbourhood officially, was one of the guests.

In the course of the evening Mr. North seemed to be desirous of entering into serious conversation with him, and at last both got seated on the ottoman together, and talked for a considerable time. Dr. Brown being anxious to know the subject of their talk, asked Mr. North what they had been conversing about. "Oh," he said, "I'll tell you. I got gradually rather closer to his conscience than he seemed to relish when he stopped me with 'Mr. North, do you study prophecy? (a thing in which the colonel rather dabbled). 'Oh, well, as part of my Bible I ought to do so, but I have not given it any special study;' whereupon I resumed, and got still closer to him, when the colonel, somewhat wincing, said, 'Mr. North, you *should* study prophecy, you would find it very interesting.' I could stand it no longer, so I said, 'Colonel, you are down at P and Q, but I am only at A, B, and C. The first thing with me is to see that I myself am right with God; I must make sure of that, and that has so absorbed me hitherto that I have not yet got past it, and I should advise you, Colonel, to make sure of the A, B, and C of your personal salvation, for only then are you safe to go on to the P and Q of Prophecy or anything else.'"

In society he was fearless as a lion in rebuking any levity on religious subjects or any approach to profanity or scepticism. He did not care who the offender might be, or what his position, he always checked it. In addressing individuals in private about their eternal interests, as well as at social gatherings, he was often called to bear the cross.

On one of his visits to London he received a letter at breakfast from a lady in Torquay, with whom he was only slightly acquainted, telling him that she

had a son in London, a colonel in the Guards, and asking him to call on him and speak to him about his soul, giving him his name and address. Mr. North did not at first like this. He did not care to intrude on a colonel in the Guards whom he had never seen, and he knew the writer of the letter so slightly that he hardly felt called on to do so. Still he kept the letter in his pocket, and it was like to burn a hole there. At last he resolved that he would call on him, but he secretly wished that he might not find him at home. On reaching his door he rang the bell, and asked if Colonel A. was at home. "Yes, sir, he is," was the answer, and he walked in and found a tall, handsome man with a long beard, very fashionably dressed. He was just about to go out to the Park. His hat was on, and he was pulling on one of his lavender kid gloves. Mr. North began the conversation by saying, "Colonel A., I have come to you on what you will think a strange errand. I am Mr. North. I had a letter from your mother yesterday morning, asking me to call on you and speak to you about your soul" "Oh, you are Mr. North," said the colonel, taking off his hat; "pray sit down on the sofa. I had a letter from my mother, leading me to expect this visit." They conversed for a while together, when Mr. North showed him the danger of being of the world, living with it and perishing with it; and also the only possible way of escape through Jesus Christ as the Saviour provided by God, and he urged him to leave the world and cleave to Christ. "But," said he, "you must do this out and out, and don't be ashamed of it. Go to your club, or to your mess, and tell them that you have changed masters." The colonel indicated that he was not prepared for this. "I daresay," said Mr. North, "you shrink from it. You would rather lead a forlorn hope or brave any military danger. The confession, however, would not be so difficult as it seems at a distance. The lion is a chained one. I am myself a proof of this now. Yesterday morning I got a letter from a lady whom I scarcely knew, asking me to go to a colonel of the Guards whom I had never seen, and speak to him about his soul. If you had got such a message, you would not have liked it." "No," he said, "I should not." "Neither did I. If any one had come to me on such an errand a few years ago, I should have turned him to the door, and I expected that you would do so to me. But instead of that you have treated me like a gentleman, given me a seat on your sofa, and entered frankly into conversation with me, and I am ashamed of my timidity."

After his conversion Mr. North once met Charles Kean, the eminent tragedian, with whom formerly he had been intimate, and to whom many thought he bore a striking personal likeness, and he wrote a note asking him to come and hear him preach, but Kean declined, saying, "he could not if he would, and he would not if he could."