

BROWNLOW NORTH:

*THE STORY*

OF

*HIS LIFE AND WORK.*

BY THE REV.

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MOFFAT.

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### XIII.

#### *LATER EVANGELISTIC WORK IN LARGE TOWNS OF ENGLAND.*

“The prayer thy lip hath prompted once, the tear thy care hath dried,  
The sin-stained soul thy comfort cheered when earth all hope denied,  
Shall rise on high on seraph wings to God’s all-listening ear,  
And through eternity resound in echoes sweet and clear.”

ANNA SHIPTON.

**A**FTER having devoted the first ten years of his evangelistic labours chiefly to Scotland, which had become to him a second home, doors of usefulness were opened to Brownlow North in many of the cities and large towns of England, and he felt himself providentially led to preach the gospel of the kingdom widely there. He returned to Scotland chiefly to rest and recruit his exhausted energies, or to fulfil special engagements, such as being present at the Annual Religious Conference in Perth in the month of September of each year.

A considerable portion also of his autumn months of repose he devoted to writing and carrying through the press his various publications, which, though far from being pretentious in their aim, were the result of much prayerful study of the Divine Word, exhibit a thorough mastery in handling his subject, and as the reader may perceive from the evidences adduced in this volume, have been not only widely circulated, but widely blessed. In addressing the public through the press, as well as from the pulpit or platform, Mr. North was following in the steps of more than one of his ancestors, who had published works and treatises of some worth in their day. The third Lord North, who was the discoverer of the medicinal virtues of Tunbridge Wells, published in 1659 “The Forest promiscuous of several Seasons’ Productions.” The first Baron Guilford, who was made Solicitor-General in 1671, and was Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, wrote several legal treatises; while the fourth Lord North in 1682 published a volume of “Essays on Light on the way to Paradise,” comprising such topics as Goodness, Eternity, and Original Sin.

The earlier years of this decade were largely devoted to England, and were far from fruitless, although from the wider extent of the field, and its distance from the scene of his former labours, it was only the most intimate among his Scotch friends who knew how the Master was owning His servant’s unwearied efforts to gather in souls. We shall give the results of these labours to a large extent in his own words, written at the time to some of his constant correspondents.

In the spring of 1868 he visited Swansea in Wales, whence he wrote:—

“I am sure you will rejoice with me, dear —, when you hear that last

night I had a meeting which to my own feelings was the most encouraging one I have had for years. It was in the Music Hall, an enormous place with double galleries, holding thousands. I went under the idea that there would not be a hundred people there, but it was crammed, hundreds standing on the floor of the lower hall. Many of the upper classes were there, and a more solemnised congregation I have seldom seen. Indeed, I hope Swansea is at least *moved*. I am very sanguine that much real good will be done. The people seemed taken aback as if it was all new to them. I believe I spoke with power. I came home softened, and cried like a child. Today the impression remains on me, and I feel at peace with God. Oh, may the peace never be again broken. May He lead, and I follow!

“Your always affectionate,

“BROWNLOW NORTH.”

A week later he again wrote:—

“I have to tell of such a meeting! The last day has been the great day of the Feast. Yesterday it was blowing a gale of wind and raining hard at the time of the meeting, and I did not think it possible I could have any people to speak to. Yet, though the storm continued, I found the place crammed, and it is an enormous place. It being the last night, I had determined to have a second address for inquirers. I began, and so far as sympathy goes, I felt that as I warmed the people warmed, and I spoke to an audience that was almost breathless through interest the whole time, for two hours and ten minutes. So far as I can judge I have not spoken so for years, but the issue is with the Lord.”

In the spring of the following year he paid a visit to Sunderland, and of the work there he writes:—

“SUNDERLAND, *March 11th*, 1869.

“I had a most precious night last night (on the cxlv. Psalm), the congregation quite carried with me. Many ministers there. After speaking for more than an hour I said something about time failing, when two or three voices cried out, ‘Go on, go on,’ and I went on for half an hour more. There was evident impression, and the ministers were delighted. To God be all the glory!!

In place of giving an account of detached services in different years, we shall give a brief, fragmentary sketch of his labours in one year, that of 1870.

In the spring of this year he held services in Birmingham. He writes on the 3rd March:—

“Last night was wonderful. Loads of young men were unable to get in, and they were just the kind I wanted. Hundreds of them were, I should

say, thoroughly 'fast' young men: but they behaved very well; first quiet, then attentive, then solemnized. The only disturbance was from one or two fainting from the heat. I preached in my fur coat! At the end a paper was handed up to me, begging for another address, which I announced for Friday, the 25th, amidst loud cheers, which I stopped. I don't, however, expect to get such another meeting. We shall see. I am rather headachy, as you may imagine after last night. I forgot to say I preached for an hour and a half fully. Too long for speaker or hearers.

"Yours affectionately,  
"BROWNLOW NORTH."

Of the closing meeting he was able to write:—

"I must send you a line on my last day in Birmingham, my visit to which I cannot but think has been of much moment to many. Two men have just left me who found me out in consequence of last night's meeting. It was a very remarkable one. The enormous place was full; mostly men—many of quite the rougher sort, who all sat, about 3,000 of them, deeply attentive for over an hour's sermon. I do think good has been done here.

"A man from North Wales wants to translate 'The Rich Man and Lazarus' into Welsh."

A few days later he was in the midst of equally exciting and engrossing work in London, of which he writes to the Earl of Kintore,—

"LONDON, *March 9th* 1870.

"MY DEAR OLD FRIENDS,——I know that you will be very glad to hear that I had a most encouraging meeting last night, in St. James's Hall. After the service, Sir Thomas Beauchamp got General Russell to introduce him, and told me that Mr. ——, an old shooting friend of mine, and a large proprietor in N——shire, had been impressed by one of my books, and would like to see me, so I agreed to go and dine with him some day to meet him: then came a young man into the waiting-room, a clerk in H. and I.'s, to say I had been the means of saving his soul when last in London. 'Yes,' said Fishbourne, as the man left the room, 'and *he* has been the means of saving hundreds of others since.' All this is very pleasing."

According to arrangement, he met his old sporting friend at dinner; and after the ladies left for the drawing-room, Mr. North began a very personal conversation about spiritual and eternal things, and got the whole of the gentlemen to bow their knees together in prayer. His friend was just starting for a long cruise in his yacht, but came to hear him preach before he sailed, and seemed much interested in the sermon. Thus it was that he

continued steadily to sow beside all waters, not observing the wind, lest he should stay his hand from sowing the precious seed, nor considering the clouds, lest he should withhold his hand from reaping the precious sheaves. There are many who are ready to work in a time of revival, who stand all the day, and day after day, idle in a time of spiritual apathy. These are little-faiths and little-hopes; but men and women who are strong in faith and hope will look more to God's promises than to human probabilities, and as with him whose work we are recording, their gleanings in the years of drought will outweigh and outvalue the whole vintage of others in their years of plenty.

At Ipswich, where he laboured after leaving London, he heard of the death of Sir James Simpson, who had proved a very true and serviceable friend to him, and wrote expressing his sorrow in characteristic fashion: "I am sorry for you, sorry for your mother, sorry for his family, sorry for myself, sorry for Edinburgh, sorry for the country, but not sorry for him."

A month later he was labouring in Plymouth, which he then visited for the first time. Of his work here he thus writes:—

"I do hope a wide-spread impression has been made. The church, the largest here, was crammed to suffocation; but for all that the minister, a good man, came up to the pulpit after the prayer, and told me there was a large crowd outside, and the doors were locked; so I got up, and asked the congregation to squeeze as close as possible, had them opened, and got in another hundred. A Church dignitary was preaching within a hundred yards or so of me, and many of those who were hearing him in the morning were hearing me in the evening. I trust the chapter and verse I was able to show them for what I told them may have dissipated his false teaching. He preaches the wisdom of man."

On leaving he received a long and warm letter of earnest thanks from a young woman for the spiritual blessing he had been the means of conveying to her. The letter is anonymous, but it shows us how the heavenly plant of grace will grow under the most adverse conditions. She writes:—

"My parents are ungodly, living utterly careless of their souls; they do not even pray to God, or say prayers at any time. I never heard them utter a word of prayer in my life. I don't think they ever think of their souls. I have tried to get them to come and hear you, but have not succeeded. Oh, pray for them. I have *not one* Christian relative. I have one or two Christian friends, but I have never been able to have Christian intercourse with them. I have often tried, but of no avail, and I never felt that I could pour out my heart to an earthly friend before I heard you. Then I thought I could tell you everything. God grant that I may (as you are leaving) have some one whom I can have Christian intercourse with! . . . I do not know

how to express myself. My soul is overwhelmed with love to Christ. I never felt nor thought in my whole life as I do now, and have ever since I heard you preach of Christ. Yes, I know God our heavenly Father did specially send you to me. You have, by your preaching, thrown fresh life across my mind, you have caused my eyes to open, and my ears to hear, and my heart to understand the boundless love of God towards us, His tenderness and compassion. You have, by the Spirit of the Lord, caused me to understand more of the love of Christ Jesus our Lord; you have caused me to put my whole trust in Jesus, and to cast myself utterly and completely on Him. I shall never, never forget you.”

Many persons complained of the hardness and even severity of Brownlow North’s preaching, and those who only heard him in public addressing sinners, and warning them to flee from the wrath to come, may not unnaturally have supposed that he looked solely at the terrors of the law, and did not himself fully realize or communicate to others the sweetness and infinite fulness of Divine love. Yet those who read the above letter, and several others in this volume, will find that he was likewise largely used by the Divine Spirit in conveying a sweet, assuring, and over-powering sense of Christ’s love to broken and contrite hearts. This was especially the case in regard to those with whom he had opportunity of conversing in private; and although, perhaps, it was a more predominant feature of the later years of his ministry, it was not by any means confined to these.

It was early in his career that he happened one day to be alone for a few minutes with a young lady, who afterwards became the wife and active helpmate of a devoted minister of Christ in Edinburgh. In early life she had felt her need of a Saviour, and tried to become a Christian, but failed in finding the sinners’ Saviour. She looked too much into her own heart, and sought there, and sought in vain, for that kind and degree of conviction of sin which she thought to be necessary to fit her for coming to Jesus. As a natural result, she was almost reduced to despair. Mr. North, guided by the Spirit, on whose direction he constantly relied, and with that aptitude to understand the exact position of an anxious soul with which he was gifted, asked her if she was saved, and on her replying that she was not, he asked her, Why? and she answered, “Because I do not feel that I love Jesus.” He then said simply, “That does not matter, *He loves you.*” No other word was spoken, but this was enough, and was the means of leading her to trust in the Saviour’s dying love to sinners. She was enabled henceforth to rest in that love, and to follow Christ, and after a useful and happy life, closed it, in the beginning of 1877, by a very triumphant death.

We are inclined to think, however, that Mr. North did not quite do himself justice, or perhaps the children of God either, by confining himself so much as he did to the discourses and the subjects with which he had begun his ministry. In new towns and districts these continued to the end to be largely blessed, and probably this made him averse to deliver many new discourses. It was certainly no indolence that led him to pursue this course, and no inability to work out fresh addresses; for the three hours of prayer and hard study of the Word of God by which he began each day are as much time and toil as most ministers devote to the preparation of two wholly new sermons each week; and the richness and variety of his original annotations in his Bible, on almost all the books of Scripture, attest the freshness of his mental powers, and the successful results of his constant study. But those who merely heard his evangelistic addresses, or even perused his published works, could form but a very imperfect idea of the fulness, the richness, the variety, the tenderness of his meditations on the Word of God which he gave out in family worship, and which he committed in a succinct and often epigrammatic form to writing on the interleaved pages and margins of his Bibles.

On closing his series of services in Plymouth he passed through London, and there addressed the Royal Hospital for Incurables, which he also presented with a gift of books. The manager, in thanking him for his address and kind present, was able to report that his words had made a great impression on these poor sufferers, who had expressed their deep gratitude for his visit.

It was an interesting trait in Mr. North's Christian character, that while as a natural orator he had a passion, and almost a weakness, for addressing very large audiences, whom he could keep spell-bound, hanging upon his lips, he never refused to go to address a small gathering when he felt that this was a leading of providence and a call from his Master; and in speaking in the Lord's name to such an assembly as a hospital for the incurable, or a ship's crew, or a police force, he from time to time received not a few precious souls for his reward. To one who once remarked to him, "You must feel it a great responsibility to address so many thousands," he replied, "I feel it a great responsibility to address half-a-dozen people."

In returning homewards he preached in Edinburgh, and when there received the following touching letter:—

*"Sunday Evening.*

"DEAR SIR,—Will you pardon the liberty a stranger takes in writing to you? I do humbly and earnestly ask an interest in your prayers. Will you pray to God that He may convert me to Himself? I have several times had

the privilege of hearing you preach in Edinburgh. The first time was a few years ago: then I was happy with my beloved mother and my brothers and sisters. Now my mother and all my sisters lie in the silent tomb beside my father. My brothers are all scattered, and I am left alone, almost without a friend in the world. After our home was broken up, I went out as governess, but at present I am again in search of a situation. Oh, dear Mr. North, will you pray for me, that though I am deprived of nearly all my earthly family, I may belong to the family of God, and not myself only, but also my three dear brothers? Do pray for us. Again I ask your forgiveness for addressing you: and that every blessing both temporal and spiritual may be vouchsafed to you and yours is the earnest desire of a young woman who loves and respects you.”

We insert this letter not only to show to what desolate and sorrowing hearts he was made the means of conveying the truest consolation, but that we may have the opportunity of stating that amid all the multitudinous correspondence addressed to him during twenty years, so far as perused by us, this is the solitary instance in which any reference is made to temporal difficulties or want of means. Yet so thoroughly was this letter prompted by a desire for spiritual and not temporal benefit, as not to be signed either with name or initials, or to bear any address by which the writer could possibly be identified. This fact proves that, although all the instances of spiritual impression might not be permanent, the profession was at least not made from hypocritical motives. It affords an ample refutation of that somewhat numerous class who sneer at the anxiety, and cast suspicion upon the sincerity, of those who profess to be spiritually concerned, simply because “What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?” are the most absorbing questions with themselves; because they have never been led to cry “What must I do to be saved?” as a question that casts all others, even the most urgent, into the shade; and because in a world of guile a few hypocrites will turn up, who will trade even upon a profession of religious conviction, and seek to impose upon the too often unsuspecting simplicity of the children of light, whom their great Master has bidden unite the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.

Mr. North now returned to his home in Elgin, and on Tuesday, the 9th of August, a public meeting of the inhabitants of Bishopmill (the suburb of Elgin, where his residence was situated) was convened, to receive from him the gift of a Mission Hall, which he had erected for their benefit, on a piece of ground close to the gate of his own residence. This beautiful residence of the Knoll had originally been purchased by him with a sum of upwards of £2,000, which was presented to him in the end

of 1860, as a testimonial by a number of his friends, after he had been for several years preaching without any pecuniary remuneration, in order to provide a home, where he might rest for part of the year, and where Mrs. North might remain while he itinerated through different parts of the country. Her fine disposition and abnegation of self made her a welcome inmate wherever she visited, but it was felt that she was being asked to make an undue sacrifice to her husband's work by being called on to lead her life entirely among strangers. On receiving this testimonial of the esteem and affection of many friends Mr. North was filled with deep gratitude, which he expressed to his cherished friend, Dr. Moody Stuart, in the following note:

*“Oct. 6th, 1860.*

“First let me thank God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for all His goodness and mercy to me. Since I first went to Him in prayer, what mercy and guidance and blessing has He not showered upon me! Some things (His greatest blessings probably) have not been in accordance with the desires of my natural man—but oh, how few even these—while the blessings and friends and comforts that He hath given me have been marvellous. To Him then first be all the praise and the gratitude! And next let me thank you, dear brother, and the other friends who have so kindly and generously come forward to render by their aid my temporal position more comfortable. Will you convey to them, one and all, my sincere and heartfelt thanks? May the Lord look on their gift as given to Him, and reward them above all that I can ask or think exceeding abundantly into their own bosoms.”

This house on the banks of the Lossie he much embellished, and laid out its grounds with great taste. He made it perhaps too tempting a paradise, and seems to have been sensible that he was in danger of making an idol of it. He had often felt sorry that since commencing his public career as an evangelist his time had been so thoroughly occupied, and his strength so utterly exhausted by his labours in the large centres of population, whose claims upon him he rightly felt to be of the first importance, that when he returned to his home he was obliged to take entire rest, so as to recuperate his physical energy, and fit himself for a new campaign of exciting and exhausting services.

He felt, however, that his poorer neighbours in Bishopmill had claims upon him, some of them being too aged and infirm to go to the regular services of the sanctuary in the adjoining town of Elgin, and others having lapsed into indifference and non-church-attendance; and he knew that these could only be reclaimed by having the gospel brought to their own doors. Accordingly, not possessing the means himself, he resolved to

make an effort among his personal friends to raise a sum of money sufficient to build a hall, that would be available at all times for missionary, evangelistic, and Sabbath-school purposes, and for holding meetings for mothers, workers, savings banks, Young Men's Christian Association, and for religious and useful lectures; and in which tea-parties, etc., might be given, but within whose walls no tobacco, wine, beer, or spirits were ever to be used. After eighteen months' effort, the requisite amount was raised, the ground purchased, the Hall built, and handed over to trustees, for behoof of the community, to be administered by them conformably to a deed of trust which he drew up. The trustees whom he appointed were earnest Christian men representing the different Presbyterian Churches, Mr. North himself representing the English Episcopalian Church.

A large and influential gathering of friends assembled in the Hall on the day of its opening, among whom were the Earl of Kintore, to whom evangelical religion in Scotland owes much, and many of the leading people in Elgin, who took an interest in the Lord's work.

One of the trustees residing in Elgin, Mr. Gall, writes under date 14th January, 1878:—

“As regards the Hall at Bishopmill, it answers the purpose for which it was erected, and is very useful in the district. A mother's meeting, and a prayer meeting are held during the week, and on Sabbath a children's service, a Sabbath school, and service in the evening. The minister of the Parish preaches once a month in it, and the minister of the Free High Church has undertaken to do the same. The other services are conducted or arranged by the trustees and are undenominational.”

Thus, both in the starting of a town-missionary and the building of a Mission Hall, was Mr. North the means of conferring signal spiritual advantages upon the town where he for many years resided. These institutions will, we trust, bear fruit for generations yet to come.

A few months after this, when it was known that Mr. North had somewhat unexpectedly, both to himself and others, formed the resolution of changing his place of stated residence to London, the inhabitants of Bishop-mill and its neighbourhood drew up and presented to him an Address, urging him to remain in their midst.

This gratifying memorial has signatures appended to it to the number of 502, and was conveyed to him on the 12th of January, 1871.

During these years of hard and incessant work he often suffered a great deal from ill-health; and it shows the intense energy and earnestness of the man, that though now upwards of sixty years of age, he still undertook and carried through such an amount of exhausting labour. A letter to Lord Kintore a year or two before he left Elgin shows that he felt the increasing

infirmities of age telling upon his frame.

“THE KNOLL, ELGIN, *Oct. 31st.*

“MY VERY DEAR KINTORE,—It is always a pleasant post that brings me a line from either of you.

“Though better, I have had several of the sciatic attacks I had, and was obliged to send an excuse on Saturday to Inverness, where I was to have preached on Sunday. Today is our fast day here; and though I am better, I am not able to leave the house, yet hope to get down to the Lord’s table on Sunday. I suspect it is the Lord’s will, if my years are lengthened, that they be years of suffering. Glory be to God! May they be years of improvement to my own soul’s good, and of patient enduring to the glory of Christ. I have grown far too earthly-minded of late. Be sure that God’s best blessing to man is *not* freedom from earthly care and trouble. With all this, however, I feel the Knoll is very pretty, and I am longing for you to see it again.

“We have got a minister who is filling our church. I have a carriage from the inn, and go regularly to the weekly prayer-meeting.

“God bless you. God bless my lady. God bless your children!

“Your always affectionate friend,

“B. N.”

The last five years of his life were very much a repetition of the year of which we have been able to give a pretty full diary.

In the spring of 1873 he visited the fashionable watering-place of Bournemouth, and his addresses there seem to have been owned by the great Master.

He wrote from his own house in London on his return,—

“Such a whirl at Bournemouth, yet I believe it was a very blessed time. The dear old baron with whom I was staying certainly seemed to get good. The last morning at prayers he wept like a child, and said afterwards, ‘Oh, you naughty man, you have made me cry: I had left that to my wife.’ And then, on a large tray of beautiful flowers being brought into the room, he said, ‘Ah, they are very beautiful; but it is North that has strewed my path with flowers.’ To God be all the glory! His was only one case of many. I came here on Saturday, to preach for Saphir last Sunday. The church was very full, and the people attentive. I preach for him again, God willing, next Sunday, and on the Sunday following at Cambridge.”

These services in the Rev. Adolph Saphir’s church were not fruitless, for among his correspondence we find a long letter of gratitude from one in her youth, who was then brought within the safe and blessed enclosure of the fold of grace. She says,—

“Indeed I am wonderfully happy and blessed in my new and precious possession, and trying to make everybody I meet be the same. Oh, the joy you will have in heaven, when many, many point to you as the means of their conversion! How I pray that I may never be cast away! I am learning a great deal of my precious Bible now. Six weeks ago was to me the beginning of days, when you preached in Mr. Saphir’s in the evening. It was then I determined to give up, God helping me, my whole heart to Jesus Christ”

Two letters from Mr. North to this young convert will be found in chapter vii.