

BROWNLOW NORTH:

THE STORY

OF

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY THE REV.

KENNETH MOODY-STUART, MA.,

MOFFAT.

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XIV.

LAST YEAR OF EARTHLY LABOUR.

“Yet, at the bidding of his Lord, he casts that net again;
His strength, the warrant of His word, his prize, the souls of men.
And day and night he seeks to win, while sinks and swells life’s tide,
Out of the troubled depths of sin, souls for which Jesus died.
The teeming net will yield at length, for labours long and hard,
For broken health and vanished strength, more than its full reward.
In life’s deep waters, o’er its shoals, spread henceforth nevermore,
The net is broken; but the souls are gathered in to shore.”

JOHN S. B. MONSELL, LL.D.

THE greater part of the last two years of Mr. North’s life was devoted to evangelistic work in the great city of Glasgow. This city contains such a vast and rapidly increasing population as to more than overtask the utmost efforts of all the churches to meet its spiritual necessities. As many of the non-churchgoing multitudes in that teeming hive of industry and commerce belong not to the sunken and pauperised, but to the prosperous and intelligent artisan class, it is clear that the desideratum is powerful preachers of the gospel as much as places of worship. For after all, it is the preachers, and not the churches or the ritual, that must attract, and arouse, and convert the people.

The Rev. W. Ross Taylor, an intimate and valued friend of Mr. North, in giving a narrative of his work at this time as it fell under his own observation, writes,—

“We may certainly regard it as a mark of God’s kindness to our honoured friend that, in 1874-75, he was permitted to reap another harvest of rich blessing before being called to his rest. No doubt it fell to the lot of other labourers to take the place of chief prominence in connection with the extensive and memorable movement of that time; but in his case also large opportunities for evangelistic work presented themselves, and his efforts were crowned with results which vividly recalled to his gladdened heart the experiences of earlier years. Friends did not know at the time that it was the sunset hour with him; they hoped that further years of usefulness were still in store; but afterwards, when the end came, they could not but observe with gratitude, even while the pain of bereavement was at their hearts, that his course had closed as it commenced, amid the warmth and glow of earnest and successful work.

“Mr. North was at this time far from physically strong. He was constantly suffering more or less from liability to chills, and from a feeling of exhaustion; but his spirit was as intense as ever, and he threw himself into the work of the revival with all the enthusiasm of his powerful nature. The feel-

ing of weakness which weighed upon him at other times vanished as soon as he found himself face to face with a congregation of eager listeners; and no stranger witnessing the energy with which he preached for fully an hour, could imagine how carefully he required to husband his strength before going into the pulpit, or how 'done' he felt after the service was over. The conviction was indeed forcing itself upon his mind, that he would require to curtail the number of his weekly services, but he was most reluctant to accept the thought, and battled against it to the last.

"In the earlier months of 1874, while Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey were holding their wonderful meetings in the various districts of Glasgow, Mr. North was at work in the large and populous suburbs which girdle that city,—Govan, Partick, and Hillhead. Reports of the remarkable results which followed the meetings in Govan were given at the time at the daily noon meetings, and tended greatly to encourage the hearts of God's children to abound in prayer for a large blessing. Of the work in the west-end suburb of Hillhead it is my privilege to speak from full personal knowledge, as the meetings were all held in Kelvinside Free Church, and extended over the entire month of March. On the first Sabbath of that month, Mr. Moody occupied the pulpit in the forenoon, and in view of the services in which the veteran evangelist was about to engage, strove to arouse the Christians among us to earnest co-operation, by preaching his powerful sermon on the text, 'To every man his work.' Mr. North followed in the evening, and preached to an overflowing congregation on 'The rich man and Lazarus;' a sermon with which he frequently commenced a series of services, as being eminently fitted to awaken spiritual anxiety, where previously indifference had reigned. And not a few in his audience that night felt their hearts tremble as they listened to his solemn and fervid words, and of these a number remained in their seats at the close of the service, to ask the old question of stricken hearts, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'

"During the weeks which followed, greatly encouraged and strengthened by the beginning which had been made, Mr. North occupied the pulpit on three evenings of each week, and preached to large congregations with rare freshness and power. There were words for all classes of hearers, for the thoughtless and the thoughtful, for the presumptuous and the doubting, for the inquiring and the enlightened, for the babes and those of mature experience; and speaker and hearers alike were sensible that the living energy of the Spirit was with the word. At one time the realities of the unseen world were portrayed with overpowering vividness; at another the loving calls of Christ were urged with persuasive tenderness; at another the absolute sufficiency of God's word, as the ground of faith, was so clearly unfolded as to dispel many long lingering doubts and misconceptions; while on other eve-

nings, choosing Psalms for his theme, the preacher analysed with admirable insight, the varied states of feeling experienced by the people of God. Many of the evangelistic or arousing addresses I had heard him deliver in other places, and I was prepared for those features of vivid representation, direct appeal, and intense urgency which always characterised them; but the addresses on the Psalms were new to me, and I was greatly struck by the richness of his exposition. He appeared himself also to have special pleasure in dwelling on these themes, although he never seemed to lose the very groundless impression that his one talent was to awaken the unconcerned. Hence it was under something like a mental protest that he allowed himself to indulge in the treatment of those topics which were becoming the most congenial to his ripening spirit, and hence too he selected those psalms only out of which he could unfold, sometimes ingeniously enough, his favourite doctrine of 'righteousness through faith.'

"At the close of each Sabbath evening service, a large number, about four or five hundred, remained to continue in prayer for a blessing; and at the close of these second meetings, inquirers remained in increasing numbers to get further guidance from those who waited to converse with them. There is good reason to believe that many of these were enabled to yield themselves truly to Christ, and in the course of pastoral visitation I found that others, who did not wait as inquirers, shared in the same blessing. It was altogether a memorable harvest time."

During the same winter Mr. North held services in the Barony Church, and concerning these the Rev. James Wells writes:—

"In the winter of 1874, Mr. North conducted a series of meetings in the Barony Free Church. His addresses then seemed to me the best I had ever heard from him, and justified the statement Dr. Duncan used to make, that he had a fine theological mind. Along with all the freshness and glowing intensity that marked his first public appeals, his utterances had a peculiar richness and mellowness. Some of his expositions of Scripture were very striking. I remember that he had a great desire to reach the hardheaded men; and, so far as I could judge, his success was chiefly among that class. I had satisfactory evidence that several of them were then brought to personal decision."

During this period of labour in Glasgow, as Mr. Taylor has noticed, Mr. North came into contact with Mr. D. L. Moody, of Chicago. Mr. Moody was at this time the centre of attraction, so that Mr. North, whose name had been wont to ring through any city in which he had come to labour, was not even known by many Christian people in Glasgow to have been steadily preaching for about a year in their city. His work was quieter than formerly, but

his labours appear to have been not less fruitful. But what we desire to call attention to, is the entire absence of anything approaching to jealousy in this honoured man of God, when he found himself, for perhaps the first time in his experience, not forgotten at all by the Master, but to a certain extent overlooked by the crowd. Mr. Moody had everything in his favour. He had the excitement of novelty, of Mr. Sankey's beautiful voice, of instrumental music, and of sacred songs, both the words and melodies of which had a great attractiveness, and all the charm of freshness. He had a marvellous faculty for organisation, which Mr. North lacked, and the Lord was making him the instrument of a very widespread revival movement. As a theologian and preacher, however, Mr. Moody would be the first to acknowledge that Mr. North was greatly in advance of him. We all know how common it is for men in the position in which Mr. North unexpectedly found himself to judge somewhat harshly of those who have the flood-tide in their favour. But his heart was filled with joy at seeing such true and successful reapers busy wielding the sickle; and in private notes to his most intimate friends he expressed his happiness at witnessing the Lord's work thus carried on by others who were drawing away the popular eye from his own labours; and he who had been accustomed to stand first proved his meetness for that honour by being most willing when called upon to take the lowest room. The Lord was thus preparing for His own presence His servant, to whom he was about to address the invitation, "Come up higher."

A letter written to his old friend the Earl of Kintore, from Liverpool, where he had come for a short time during Mr. Moody's visit there, shows his own sense of the precarious state of his bodily health, and also his opinion of Moody and Sankey.

"SANDFIELD PARK, WEST DERBY,

"LIVERPOOL, *March 4th.*

"MY DEAREST KINTORE,—I was very glad to get your two kind letters, as was Mrs. H—. I am getting older and uglier and deafer every year, not attractions with which to make new friends, so I am more jealous of the old ones, and I should be sorry to lose many of them if I could help it, and none more so than yourself, dear Kintore, for we have travelled together as friends over many a long year of good report and evil report. My ending, I suspect, is not very far off, for I am full of gout and rheumatism, added to which Sir William Gull, whom I consulted, says I have a weak heart and enlarged liver. Notwithstanding all this, however, I had accepted an invitation to speak in the enormous hall here, built for Moody and Sankey, on next Sunday, but fortunately for Liverpool and myself, they are not ready for them in London, and we have got them here for another Sunday. Their success is a miracle, perfectly superhuman! Every service crammed, and

after every service the inquiry room also. Of course the devil rages, as he always does when God works: and He *is* working, I most firmly believe, *mightily*. I cannot tell you how sorry I am to hear of dear —— being such an invalid.

“The whole household are gone in to hear Moody and Sankey, or I am sure would send you every kind message. I am sipping barley-water in single blessedness. I am so glad to hear —— got such a blessing from M. and S. May the Lord increase it more and more! for she has had much trial lately.

“Always and ever yours most affectionately,

“BROWNLOW NORTH.”

We shall next record an instance of blessing in which the beginning and the close of this good workman’s sowing the seed of life were linked together in a wise and watchful providence.

After one of his services in the Free Church of Sighthill, Glasgow, a young man came into the vestry, and thanked Mr. North, with the tear in his eye, for having been the instrument of his conversion in another church in the city some months previously. He then related to Mr. North the substance of the following statement, which we are enabled to give in his own words.

He says,—“On the Sabbath in question I called to see a young friend at the south side of Glasgow. Conversation getting stale, I proposed a walk to pass the time. We passed Mr. Riddel’s church: my friend told me that Mr. North was preaching, so I said, ‘Let’s go in.’ I may remark that my friend had very serious views on religion. Mr. North preached from the words, ‘Jesus Christ, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.’ I came away from the church no better than I entered it, save that I had got one idea from the sermon. And reasoning with myself, I came to the conclusion that up to the present time I had been a ‘fool,’ and that Jesus Christ was to me but ‘foolishness.’ My friend offered to accompany me a part of the way home, and as we were crossing the Clyde I felt as if all the powers of hell had put their heads together to tempt me: so strong were my feelings, that I stopped on the bridge, and said to myself, ‘This matter must be settled, either the one way or the other, before I cross this river.’ I heard the jeers already in my ears from my mocking companions, and the scoffs of the world, but by the grace of God I was enabled to view the two sides of the question, and I decided for God. And no sooner had I done so, than joy which words cannot express filled my heart. My companion noticed the change, and I explained to him the cause. I felt so light, that I did not feel my feet touch the ground. By the grace of God I can say that Jesus Christ is still to me ‘the wisdom and the power of God.’”

When he had related this to Mr. North, he told him he was the son of a minister in Morayshire, who had asked him to preach to his people at the very beginning of his career, but had himself been removed by death before the dawn of the Sabbath fixed on, three weeks later. That service had been a solemn one, the crowds being such that they had to adjourn to the open air. Mr. North had spoken to the people with great feeling, on the death of their revered pastor, whose recent removal caused many to weep tears of heartfelt sorrow. Sixteen years had elapsed since then, and the Lord had guided His servant's son, now training as an engineer in Glasgow, to hear the gospel, and be brought to the saving knowledge of Christ by the lips of this very evangelist, whose course was now nearly finished.

Mr. North was much overcome at the recital, and as a friend who was present was about to assist him on with his top-coat, he took it from him, and handing it to the young convert, said, "Let my *child* help me on with it."

It was not Mr. North's habit to remain in the church or vestry after preaching to converse with anxious inquirers at an after-meeting. He preferred to see them the following day; his reason being that he was so heated and exhausted by the exertion of preaching, that he was liable to be chilled, unless he returned home at once. In the year 1872-3, when assisting Mr. Riddel in Glasgow, being specially asked, he stayed to converse with some inquirers one evening, the consequence being that he caught a chill, and was prostrated the next day with a painful illness which confined him to bed for many weeks. Yet so eager was he to preach that, in spite of all dissuasion, when the hour of each advertised service arrived he rose from bed, wrapped up and drove to the church, preached amid much bodily pain and weakness, retiring to bed again the moment he returned home. This course he continued three times every week until the month of services he had arranged for in that church was concluded, because he had evidence that the Lord was at that time blessing his message. Some persons blamed Mr. North for undue care and pampering of himself, and reference has been made to this in the contributions inserted from several of his friends, in their desire to be perfectly impartial in estimating his character. But that this little failing was greatly exaggerated by many, this incident will show. And Mr. North, with a weakened frame, was now over sixty-three years of age.

The physician who saw him on his death-bed said that his heart was in such a state that he might at any time have dropped down in the pulpit, and from Sir William Gull's opinion he was fully aware that that organ was seriously affected. Yet so anxious was he to fulfil his ministry, that he preached often when physically unable for the effort.

As an evidence of the widespread fruits of his ministry, a friend has told

us that when he was staying in her house in Edinburgh on one occasion for six weeks, not a single day passed in which the bell did not ring, bearing a message of thanks to him, either by word of mouth or by letter, for his having been the means of bringing the speaker or writer to the knowledge of the Saviour. Even in localities in which Mr. North never preached, not a few instances of conversion under his ministrations have been traced. It was so in the village of Moffat, in Dumfriesshire, where, a few months before Mr. North's decease, the writer of this volume came, within a short interval, upon two persons who spoke of him as their spiritual father. The first was a gentleman who was passing through, lecturing upon Sabbath-school work, in which he had extensive experience, and who mentioned that he had been converted and brought to the Lord under Mr. North in Edinburgh, in Free St. Luke's, in 1858. The second was a young domestic servant encountered in pastoral visitation, whose bright smile and ready answer to some question about the state of her soul, told that her heart had been given to Jesus. When asked if it was long since she had known the Lord as her Saviour, she said it was only a few months since she had been brought to Christ under Mr. North, in Kelvinside Church, Glasgow, in the beginning of 1875.

One of the last letters we have found in his repositories, apart from those of personal friends, was addressed to him by an English gentleman in the autumn of this year, 1875, thanking him for his prayers with his wife after a carriage accident at Tarbet, and for an exposition he had given of John v. at that place, and also for instruction and help they had both derived from reading one of his books which he had kindly presented to them. Thus his useful and busy life drew to its close, filled with work for the Saviour who had bought him with a price, and who, when He came suddenly, found His servant at his post, distributing to friends and strangers, in public and in private, a portion of spiritual meat in due season.