

BROWNLOW NORTH:

THE STORY

OF

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY THE REV.

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MOFFAT.

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III.

FIRST PRIVATE EFFORTS TO SAVE SOULS.

“I say to thee, Do thou repeat
To the first man whom thou dost meet
In lane, highway, or open street,
That he, and thou, and all men move
Under one canopy of love,
As broad as the blue sky above.”

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

THE grace of God in the heart of man very soon betrays its presence. It is the imparting to the soul of the mind of Christ, which desires the welfare of our brother as well as the glory of our God. In its own nature it is expansive and communicative. It is like light, whose property it is to shine; like salt, whose nature it is to communicate to foreign substances its saltiness; like seed, which ever seeks to reproduce itself; like water, which descending from above into an earthly heart, becomes therein a well of water springing up to everlasting life. These are not accidents, but are essential properties of grace wherever found. The soul that was dead, when made alive is made a new centre and spring of life amid a world of death. Christ's people are the immortal seed which is destined to fill the world's face with fairest fruit. Life loves to work; and where there is no work there is no life, or only weak and dying life.

We need not wonder then to find that Brownlow North, as soon as he had seen the Saviour, desired to point Him out to others; as soon as he had tasted of the living water, sought to lead others to the fountain's brink, and to persuade them to stoop down and drink. The wonder would have been had it been otherwise. His energy of character, natural gifts, and power of mind, combined with special grace vouchsafed to him, made him the powerful preacher he afterwards became; but grace, native and simple, made him, what it makes every true recipient, anxious within his present sphere to use each opportunity to commend his Saviour by lip and life to all with whom he came in contact.

He has told us that it was about eleven months after his awakening at Dallas, when he strongly felt it to be his duty to do some service for the Lord. For two months before this he had shut himself up in his own room, reading the Bible and praying. He then said to himself that he must do something for God, but felt that he could not. The thought suggested itself to his mind that he might at least distribute tracts, but he felt that to do so would make himself ridiculous, and that the people would laugh at him and call him mad. At last he resolved to try, and putting a number of tracts into his pocket, he went into the most secluded part of Elgin, in which he was

living. The first person he met with was an old woman, who amazed him by accepting his tract without laughing at him. To another old woman whom he saw coming down the road he presented another tract, and she received it with thanks. The third he gave to a policeman, who said, "Thank you, Mr. North." He recorded it as his experience after fourteen years' trial, that only on one occasion was a tract refused, and that was by a professed infidel, and yet he had systematically given away tracts to persons of all ranks, in all sorts of places. Very few Christians can be preachers like Brownlow North, but there are none who cannot be tract distributors.

Like most other persons, he found it no easy thing to serve the Lord and try to do good to the souls of others, especially at the commencement of his course. There is often opposition in our own hearts before we can humble ourselves even to hand a tract to an acquaintance or to an unknown fellow-passenger, and sometimes, though rarely, we may find our proffer of a tract resented as a liberty. Mr. North met with some opposition at first, even in giving away tracts. The Rev. Dr. Fergus Ferguson mentions that once in Glasgow, when he had preached a public sermon in which he referred to Mr. North as a remarkable trophy of Divine grace, a gentleman asked to be introduced to him at the close of the service, and told him that he came from a district in the West Highlands, in which Mr. North had resided a considerable time before his conversion, and that he recollected his returning there after his great change, and trying, by giving away tracts, to undo some of the evil he had done. The people, probably doubting the sincerity of his repentance, avoided him and his tracts. Mr. North bore this with beautiful humility, as a cross which perhaps he deserved to bear. But he was not on this account discouraged or weary in well-doing, but left the tracts lying in prominent places on the roads, and on windy days put them under stones, that the wind might not blow them away, and that that other wind, that bloweth where it listeth, might gain access to some poor sinner's heart.

He always continued the practice of tract-distribution, although to the last he often found it a trial to do so. We have heard him say that, after he had served the Lord for years, it sometimes cost him half an hour's internal struggle before he could muster courage to offer a tract to a gentleman travelling in a railway carriage with him. Once on arriving at Ramornie to visit his friend Sheriff Maitland Heriot, he mentioned that in crossing the ferry to Tayport in the steamer he saw a group of gentlemen talking. His conscience told him that he ought to embrace the opportunity, and speak, or give a tract to them; but then it would be much more pleasant and easy to do nothing. This went on for some time, but at last the feeling that it might be a matter of eternal life or death gained the victory, and approaching them he offered each of them a tract, which was accepted quite politely, and he found that some of the company had recognized him, and would rather

have been surprised if he had remained quiet. Following out his views of the usefulness of these short messengers of truth, he wrote afterwards a number of pointed and powerful tracts on the leading truths of salvation, which, as will be seen from this volume, have been greatly blessed to souls.. We have before us three long and carefully drawn out lists of tracts which he ordered from London, that he might distribute them with his own hand in Elgin; for he felt himself as yet unworthy to speak a word to a fellow-sinner on behalf of his Saviour. These lists contain the names of one hundred and thirty-nine different tracts, of each of which he ordered quantities varying from twenty to fifty.

In this way the first year closed from the date of his awakening at Dallas. About this time he began to visit among the sick and poor at Elgin, particularly those connected with Mr. Gordon's church. A friend who knew him well at that time writes: "I remember his supplying the very poor and bed-ridden with many little comforts, such as introducing gas into their cheerless rooms, and paying for it himself. I have myself gone with him to see some of these poor creatures, and I shall never forget some of these visits, one in particular, to a poor wretched old body, who had been unable to leave her bed for years. Mr. North would take a little stool, sit down by her unlit fire, and peel oranges for her, and this in a room where the surroundings were too disgusting even to mention. At that time, I, for one, felt that I could not be in his company for a quarter of an hour without being benefited by it. We all loved him much."

Once, in Aberdeen, in January 1863, when speaking of this time, in drawing a contrast between the promptings of the flesh and the promptings of the Spirit, he said, "When I first came to know the Lord, the Spirit said to me, 'Brownlow North, there's that woman in the porter's lodge; you ought to go and speak to her about religion.' But the flesh said, 'Do nothing of the sort; keep what you've got to yourself.' But the Spirit gave me no rest till I went to the woman at the porter's lodge, and read the Bible to her, and told her what the Lord had done for my soul. Then again the Spirit said to me, 'There's that washerwoman in the town, you know; you should go to her, and read and pray with her also.' But the flesh said, 'Do nothing of the sort; she will likely think that she has more religion than you have.' Still the Spirit would give me no rest till I read and prayed with the washerwoman also." In these early visits he seems to have confined himself to giving away tracts, reading the Bible, and occasionally engaging in prayer.

The first time, according to his recollection, when he went to speak to anyone directly about the soul, was on being sent for in November 1855 by a woman who carried his letter bag, to speak to her dying niece. Feeling this to be a call from God, he went to the house. He found that she was a Christian, and drawing rapidly near her end. The poor dying girl said to

him, "O sir, never mind me; but say something through me to my father, for father is a bad man." He addressed himself to her father, who seemed impressed, as was also his wife, by his words, and by the solemn circumstances he was in. Two careless persons who happened to be present were interested in what Mr. North said, and returned to hear him speak whenever he visited the house. The father became a reformed man. The news of this spread among the neighbours, and they flocked into the dying girl's room whenever Mr. North was present. After this had gone on for several days, a woman came to him, and said, "O sir, I wish you would come and speak to my husband, as you are speaking here; for he is a bad man too, and I think you might do him good." He agreed to go and converse with the man; and on leaving, he asked him to return, saying that he would gather ten or twelve of his fellow-workmen, who were journeymen shoemakers, to listen to him. He addressed the little gathering of shoemakers as requested, who were so interested that they asked him to come and speak to them again, and on coming on the evening named, he found the room crowded with some fifty or sixty people. The shoemaker who had asked him to give the address afterwards died rejoicing in Jesus, as did also his wife. Thus drawn by providential leading into this work, he soon found himself holding a cottage meeting every evening of the week, and once spoke in a granary to about two hundred people.

Mrs. Macdonald, the widow of the Rev. John Macdonald of Calcutta, went to one of these little gatherings one evening. She could get no further in than half-way up the stairs, and told a friend that she had heard nothing like it since she listened to her father-in-law, the "Apostle of the North."

From various quarters we have received testimony to the interest that was awakened and the good that was effected by these visits to the sick, and little cottage meetings held in Elgin and its immediate neighbourhood. Mr. John Kintrea, referring to these meetings, writes:—"During the first year of his residence in Elgin, Mr. North was much in the habit of visiting the sick, and at such visits he ordinarily read and explained suitable passages of Scripture. The neighbours generally were on the watch for his visits, and came into the sick-room to hear him, often crowding the apartment to the inconvenience of the sufferer. In one instance, because of this, his meetings had to be discontinued. In addition to his Elgin cottage-meetings, which were at this time almost nightly, he held weekly meetings in Bishoppmills, a loft having been got for the purpose; and although the place was capable of holding a good number, such was the desire to hear him, that the loft was crowded before the hour of meeting, numbers having to go away unable to get a hearing.

"Sometimes, after conducting these little services, one of the office-bearers of the Free Church would convoy him home, to whom he often ex-

pressed his fears lest he should, in holding such meetings, be travelling beyond the line of duty, and trespassing upon the sphere belonging to the ministry. Yet he could find no satisfactory reason to his own mind for refusing calls to go and speak at such gatherings when invited to do so. At this time this subject seemed to occupy his mind a good deal, and he appeared to be looking up for light and guidance.”

It was now that Mr. John Gow, late town missionary in Elgin, became acquainted with Mr. North. Mr. Gow had long been in the habit of visiting the patients in Gray’s Hospital on Sabbath afternoons. One night, as he was returning home, a gentleman, whom he did not know, put two tracts into his hand, and on mentioning the circumstance next day to some of his acquaintances, he learned that it was a gentleman recently converted, who had begun to hold cottage-meetings through the town, and that he was to hold one on the following Tuesday in a room in Masson Lodge Close. Accordingly Mr. Gow went to the meeting, which he much enjoyed, and at the close was introduced to Mr. North as a brother worker. Mr. North invited him to another of his addresses which he had arranged to give in Fraser’s Close, and at the same time expressed a wish to accompany him to Gray’s Hospital, which he did the following Sunday, and on several succeeding ones.

A short time after Mr. North told him that he thought a Scripture-reader would be very useful in Elgin, and asked him if he were willing to undertake the duties, which after careful consideration he decided to do. Mr. North then applied to his friends in Elgin to raise the needful salary in annual subscriptions, and got a local committee appointed to superintend the work. Mr. Gow began his work as missionary in March 1856, and prosecuted it till his sudden death in the spring of 1878, not without tokens of the Master’s blessing. After some years Mr. Robert Brander, banker, Elgin, most liberally made over the sum of £1,000, the interest of which was to be applied to the annual salary of the missionary.

Thus from the very first Mr. North not only threw himself heart and soul into hard and earnest work for his Saviour, but exerted himself to secure the co-operation both of voluntary assistants and of stated and regular labourers; realizing the immense strength of Satan’s kingdom in the earth, and that to attack it with any hopes of solid and lasting victory demands all the combined strength, wisdom, and zeal of the soldiers of the cross.

Having at first scruples about the propriety of one who was merely a layman doing so much in the way of addressing his fellow-men, even in these small meetings, he spread the whole matter before the Lord in prayer, asking Him to close the door if it were not in accordance with His will that he should thus address his fellow-sinners. Waiting and watching the indications of Providence for an answer to his prayer, he received an increasing

number of requests to speak, and heard of an increasing number of cases of spiritual impression. Thus he gathered assuredly that the Lord did not wish him to be altogether silent.

About this time another providential circumstance led him to believe that the Lord was calling him to speak, and not to hold his peace. He had gone up, as he told the Rev. C. H. Scott, to England to see his beloved mother, now rejoicing over the conversion of her prodigal, her long prayed for, and now penitent son, and “when in London he went on a Sunday afternoon to see a Morayshire young man, who had been appointed secretary to a Young Men’s Christian Institute. This young man had himself been converted in a sudden and remarkable manner; and, filled with zeal for God and love to souls, used to spend his Sunday afternoons in street preaching. When Mr. North called on him, he was just preparing to visit one of his stations situated at King’s Cross, and asked Mr. North to accompany him. They went together. The young man took up his station at his accustomed corner, and after devotional exercises began to address a promiscuous but not very numerous assembly. His words did not *tell*, and were received at first with indifference, and soon with angry opposition and a torrent of foulest blasphemy. Mr. North was beginning to doubt the wisdom of thus casting pearls before swine, and giving occasion to the worst blasphemy he had ever listened to, when several voices were heard calling upon him to speak. “We’ll hear that stout man with the dark eyes.” Thus called on, he felt constrained to speak. Instantly every eye was fixed on him. He riveted and retained the attention of all; and when he met the blaspheming sophistry of the infidel, he manifestly carried the bulk of his audience along with him. When addressing to them a closing personal appeal, he was forced to stop through sheer exhaustion and want of breath. Many cried out, “Go on, sir; we want to hear more.” But he was physically unable to say more. On which an old man exclaimed, “Sir, your words should be written in letters of gold!”

Mr. North was encouraged by this essay at addressing publicly a most unwilling audience on the state of their souls, and by his success in apparently interesting and impressing them.

Shortly after this, in May 1856, he left Elgin for a little, by the doctor’s advice, to take rest and recruit his strength, which was worn out by the multitude of his daily cottage-meetings and visitations, and went to Dallas, his old residence, where he was looking forward to worship in the Free Church on the following Lord’s Day. The Rev. W. Davidson, the minister, was called away from home, and no supply could be got for the pulpit. Mr. North was told that there would be no sermon unless he consented to address the people, and was urgently pressed to agree to do so. After objecting to speak in a regular place of worship, on the ground of not being ordained, he agreed that if one of the elders read a chapter and conducted the devo-

tional exercises, and called on him to give an address, he would do what he could. The people were impressed both by what they heard and by what they saw; for they saw one who had for years lived in their midst a reckless and godless life, now standing up and warning them to flee from coming wrath, to which his own eyes had eighteen months before been suddenly opened. On the Monday morning following there was a great flood in the river, and two little children, trying to cross it on a plank, were washed off and drowned. This sad event plunged the village into mourning, and as the minister was from home, the father came and entreated Mr. North to comfort the bereaved mother. He did so. The bodies of the little children were recovered from the cruel flood on two successive days of suspense and sorrow, and as each little corpse was carried to the door of the dwelling which they had left together in health and happiness, a sympathising crowd accompanied each sorrowful procession, and Mr. North addressed them, impressing more deeply the truths which he had preached the previous Sabbath. Towards the end of the week the minister returned home. Finding his people impressed by the services, and being asked soon after to go and preach elsewhere, he agreed to do so, and constrained Mr. North again to address his people. The church was crowded, people flocking from a distance to hear the new preacher and his rousing message. Among the audience were two men from Forres, about eight miles off, who carried home with them the tidings of this work of awakening. In consequence a deputation was sent to ask him to give an address in the Free Church there. He presented the same objections as he had done to Mr. Davidson; but the people would take no denial, and he went and held several evening services. The first night he had a large and earnest audience, the next night the church was full, after which passages, staircases, and doorways were thronged with eager and anxious listeners. We are told by one who knows the locality well that permanent good was effected at that time, and that the fruits of that, as of other revival movements, may still be traced.

Mr. North on several occasions was at pains to explain the position he then occupied. "Don't think," he said, "that I am intruding into the office of the holy ministry. I am not an authorized preacher, but I'll tell you what I am; I am a man who has been at the brink of the bottomless pit and has looked in, and as I see many of you going down to that pit, I am here to 'hollo' you back, and warn you of your danger. I am here, also, as the chief of sinners, saved by grace, to tell you that the grace which has saved me can surely save you."

In the providence of God the ministry of Mr. North thus began at Dallas, which had been for many years the scene where he lived after the course of this world, eagerly following its fashions, frivolities, and sins. It was here that God so ordered it that he gave his first public testimony in the house of

God on behalf of the Son of God, whom by his life he had so resolutely opposed and persecuted. After his great change, when a friend asked him what he intended to do, his reply was, "I have done all the harm I could in Scotland, and now I intend to remain there and do all the good I can." It is always hard to unlearn evil that has through a course of years been learned, but it is harder still to undo evil that has through a course of years been done. It was touching to those who met him in private after his conversion to see how much his heart was set on this, how earnestly he longed and prayed for it, and it is touching to find to what a very large extent his heavenly Father granted him this desire of his heart, and made him useful to many to whom of old his influence had been hurtful. We have only been able to obtain clues to this interesting feature of his work in a few cases; but from knowing how much his heart was set on it, and from the humanly speaking accidental manner in which these cases have come to our knowledge, we cannot doubt that, could we trace the influence of his two lives, we should find many instances in which his God made him a minister of mercy to those whom formerly he had encouraged on the broad way that leadeth to destruction.

As showing how much he desired and laboured for the conversion of such, we may state that shortly after his awakening, and long before he found peace himself, he undertook a long journey to visit a careless family with whom he had been intimate, to try to arouse them to concern for their souls. While residing in the house of my father, he once confined himself to his room for a great portion of the day, writing a letter with which he seemed much burdened, and he mentioned that the reason why it was costing him so much anxiety and prayer was, that it was addressed to one whom he had known well in the days of his folly and sin, and whom he now earnestly desired to be the means of leading to the Saviour he had found.

A gentleman, who had been a boy at Eton with him, wrote in reply to a letter asking for information about his Eton days, that all his school recollections of North were painful and saddening; and yet, in God's all-wise providence, Brownlow North was made a means of blessing to his old schoolfellow's son, who is now a minister in the Church of England. Regarding this case, which was one that gave him much encouragement at the time, Mr. North wrote to a friend

"LONDON, *Dec. 26th*, 1859.

"I must tell you an incident of my first meeting in Exeter Hall. On that evening a Mr. A—, who was the boy that sat next to me at Eton, in school, for about five years, and who is himself a Christian, and felt much interested in his old school-friend, Brownlow North, came up from Buckinghamshire to hear me speak. He came to me in the Committee Room, and

made himself known to me, and introduced his son, a fine young man about twenty-two. On the Friday night after, just before going into a lecture I was to give in the City, the door opened, and in rushed A—, his face beaming with delight, followed by his son. He had come up to tell me that his son had been convinced of sin in Exeter Hall; had gone home, and been in such trouble that he could not rest; had been obliged to come up again to my inquirers' meeting; had found the Lord, and there he was to speak for himself. It was unspeakably interesting—the young man standing in the midst of many gazers, and humbly confessing Jesus. To God alone be all the deep gratitude and glory.”

Naturally many of his old acquaintances dropped in to hear him preach, men who had been his associates on the moors, at the billiard-table, or at the hunt. An officer addressing him one day, said, “The last time I saw you, you were lying on your back in the hunting-field, your horse rolling over you.” One day in Edinburgh a Christian lady, who has long since entered into the joy of her Lord, wrote to ask him to visit her brother-in-law, who had been one of the friends of his godless days. He shrank greatly from it, but intended to do so, when he mislaid the gentleman's address, and could not find it. He was in a cab on his way to the station, starting for Glasgow, when on putting his hand into one of his pockets he found the lost address. How many would in the circumstances have taken not altogether reluctant advantage of the temporary loss of the address to salve their consciences for the postponement of an unpleasant duty! But Mr. North at once, at considerable inconvenience to himself, put off his departure from town, drove straight to the residence of his former acquaintance, and spoke to him most faithfully and seriously about the concerns of his soul.

Let no one imagine that it cost him no effort to speak thus personally to his fellow-men about Christ. Those who enjoy the stimulus of addressing large and sympathizing audiences find none of this natural excitement in speaking to one unwilling listener. Especially is it a trial to do so when the person addressed is in one's own position in society, and most of all is it hard for flesh and blood, and “against the grain,” as we say, when the unwilling listener is a personal acquaintance.

That much honoured and experienced minister of Christ, the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., of Glasgow, mentioned to us that once he happened to be on a visit at the shooting-quarters of a friend in the Western Highlands, in a district where Brownlow North had lived a good deal in his godless days. When there, he was asked to see a lady who was on her deathbed, and who, along with her husband, had been an intimate friend of Mr. North's, and on whom he was conscious that his example and friendship had exercised a deleterious influence. After his conversion he had returned to this locality

for the express purpose of trying to undo some of the evil he had done, and to testify for Christ where he had openly served the devil; and among others in this district to whom he was blessed was this lady. When Dr. Miller visited her, not long before her death, she was full of adoring praise to that God who had saved her as a brand from the burning, and who had done it through the instrumentality of one whose influence with her had formerly been all for evil. Thus it was that God gave him back, as saved souls for his reward, one and another and another of those with whom he had travelled on the broad way; and in his conduct in this has not this servant of God left us an example that we should follow in his steps?

From the date of his conversion, Mr. North carried the conscientiousness we see displayed in these instances of seeking to save the souls of his friends into everything that he viewed in the light of duty. He was in the habit of impressing upon young converts the duty of setting before themselves a high ideal of the Christian life from the outset of the heavenly race, and trying steadfastly to act up to it, to ask God's guidance in all matters, and to seek to do all to His glory.

An incident which illustrates this point happened when he was staying at the hospitable home of his dear friend Mr. Grant of Arndilly. Arndilly is one of the most beautifully situated mansions in Strathspey, where that fair Northern river, the joy of the angler and the artist, with lordly flow sweeps round the house, beyond the sloping lawn with its hoary timber, that stretches from the Hall door down to the river bank. Mr. North had been laid aside by the doctor's orders from active work for a little, and had gone to Arndilly to recruit his strength. A lady, who was a guest in the house at the time along with him, sends us her recollection of the incident. "Those who were acquainted with Mr. North's counsels to converts will remember how constantly he held up Col. iii. 17, as the proper touchstone by which to prove every action: 'Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.' 'If you can do it in the name of Jesus,' was Mr. North's advice, '*do it; if not, don't.*' He had a strong desire to try the effect of a little amusement at his favourite pastime of fishing. His conscience was very tender on the subject, and just because he was so fond of it, and never had handled a fishing-rod since his conversion up to that time (this was in August 1860), he asked Mr. Grant's advice on the subject before a large party at luncheon. 'Arndilly, tell me, do you think I should fish this afternoon?' The reply in substance was, 'If you are not able *to fish for men*, and if you think it would make you sooner able to do that, I don't see why you should not. But let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' Mr. North said, 'Well I will go into my room and ask the Lord Jesus Christ to come with me, and unless I feel persuaded that He will go with me, I will not go.'" The sequel is told in a letter to my father.

“ ARNDILLY, *August 9th*, 1860.

“MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,—I have just got your dear kind letter, and will not go to bed without writing a line. You remember our conversation about ‘fishing.’ Well, after much thought and some prayer, I felt it was bondage not to go. I felt sure it would do me good, and out I went. With every cast of my rod I seemed to improve in health. The first day I killed a fish—second day none—third day, engaged a man to come with me, and going out about four in the afternoon we killed six, (I four and he two,) and walked and felt a new man in mind and body for vigour and spirits. Fourth day, started after dinner, about four. [The lady whose letter was quoted above, says she went with him that day, and that they had hardly been a quarter of an hour on the river before he had landed two grilse.] Going down a steep bank, I slipped, and broke a sinew in my leg, and was brought up the brae on a man’s back, and home in a donkey chair! From the first moment I was able to say, It is the Lord, and to praise, and I am sure that it was His hand in love. I *could not fall* to the ground without His will, and I felt it was His will to stop the fishing, *perhaps*; but of this I am not clear. I have now been laid up a week, with my leg in a thing that keeps it bent, and in a few days I hope, with the help of a high-heeled shoe, to hobble about. The pain is almost all gone and I have been out in the donkey-chair, for my room happens mercifully to be on the ground floor. I do not think my health one bit worse for the confinement, and feel very happy; and the day after the accident I got a letter from a lady in London in distress, praying me to answer her in the ‘Revival,’ which I shall only do by a line: but her letter stirred me up to write another tract, which is nearly finished, which I have great expectation God will exceedingly bless, and which I feel quite sure I should never have written if it had not been for the accident. I was getting so fond of the fishing, and it was doing me so much good. Oh, do pray for me, dear brother, that whatever the Lord would have me to learn, He will send His Holy Spirit to teach me for Christ’s sake; for if He does not, though the book is put before me in the shape of ‘accident’ or what not, I shall learn nothing aright. I got much pleasure out of Romans viii. 28 and 32 the other day: ‘We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,’ etc. These things are all so literally true and real, or else there is no truth in any part of God’s Word, and as that is not true, it follows *all* is true. And oh what joy and peace thus to receive it! A principal and in your letter a *dashed* word defies me to read. I wish you would learn to write better; but don’t put off writing to me till you do; for, hard as they are to read, I can say, ‘without dissimulation,’ I love to hear from you, and almost always get some good from your letters. Reid wrote to ask permission to print my last tract in the ‘Stirling Messenger,’ which of course I gave him. This gives it a large circulation at once, praise the Lord. Most who will read

it will be persons more or less concerned about religion. Who can tell the good that may not be done! But would I rejoice as much if it were somebody else's tract? Alas, no. Oh to be unselfish and single-eyed! Pray for me."

"B. N."

What with his previous overwork and breakdown in health, and the accident in fishing, he was laid aside for a good many months. Most of his Christian friends, who are in the habit of observing the Lord's dealings, will probably think that the illness and subsequent accident were both sent in a never-erring Providence for one purpose, to take him apart by himself with his Lord "into a desert place, that he might rest awhile." The soul is apt to receive injury by constant and excessive and exciting work in the Lord's vineyard, and many have had cause to say, "They made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." The God of all grace was pleased thus to hedge up his way with thorns for a season, that he might be preserved from the snares which beset one who is very successful and immensely popular, and that the work of grace might be advanced in his own heart, that thus he might be made still more useful to others.

A few months afterwards, and while still forbidden to resume work, he writes to my father: "Need I say how *very, very* much I should have liked to have been able to come to Edinburgh? And I *could* do it, but I cannot see that I could ask God's blessing on going. It would look in my own eyes as if I thought He could not do so well without me, when He can, as He has shown; and may He do so in your midst yet more, and that exceeding abundantly above all that I can ask or think. May the Lord be with you in public and in private."

Another instance of his scrupulous conscientiousness may be given. When laid aside through overwork, he went into the premises of Mr. Yapp, the publisher, in London. His friend asked him what he was doing. He told him that he was laid aside, and felt that if he were to preach just now he should die. Mr. Yapp, perhaps thinking that he was over-careful, replied, "Well, then, preach and die." Mr. North, in relating it to a friend, said, "And something has been saying to me ever since that perhaps I should just 'preach and die.'"

When Mr. North came before the public as a preacher of Christ crucified, there were not a few even of earnest-minded Christians who thought that he ought to have lived in seclusion for some years, or confined himself wholly to such private efforts to do good as have been recorded in this chapter. Although a whole year had elapsed since he became a reformed man, before he ventured to open his lips in public, still a year was as nothing to a lifetime spent in serving another master. Opinions differed as to

whether he should have remained silent for a longer period after his conversion; but looking back upon his ministry, it will be manifest that he entered upon it just at the right time, so far as man can judge, with regard to the Lord's gracious purposes concerning our beloved land. He was sent a preacher of the stamp of John the Baptist to awaken dormant souls, to break up the fallow ground, and by ploughing deep into men's consciences to prepare them for that flood of blessing which was to follow in the course of two or three years in the Revival of 1859-60. Still the fact that his life was publicly known to have been in opposition to the law of God, if it attracted many from curiosity to hear him, awakened bitter opposition in others; but the Lord so overruled it as to bring good out of this evil.

Mr. Grant, of Arndilly, has recorded an incident bearing on this point.

One evening Mr. North was about to enter the vestry of a church in one of our Northern towns in which he was going to preach, when a stranger came up to him in a hurried manner, and said, "Here is a letter for you of great importance, and you are requested to read it before you preach to-night." Thinking it might be a request for prayer from some awakened soul, he immediately opened it, and found that it contained a detail of some of his former irregularities of conduct, concluding with words to this effect: "How dare you, being conscious of the truth of all the above, pray and speak to the people this evening, when you are such a vile sinner?" The preacher put the letter into his pocket, entered the pulpit, and after prayer and praise, commenced his address to a very crowded congregation; but before speaking on his text he produced the letter, and informed the people of its contents, and then added, "All that is here said is true, and it is a correct picture of the degraded sinner that I once was; and oh how wonderful must the grace be that could quicken and raise me up from such a death in trespasses and sins, and make me what I appear before you tonight, a vessel of mercy, one who knows that all his past sins have been cleansed away through the atoning blood of the Lamb of God. It is of His redeeming love that I have now to tell you, and to entreat any here who are not yet reconciled to God to come this night in faith to Jesus, that He may take their sins away, and heal them." His hearers were deeply impressed by the words he spoke, and that which was intended to close his lips was overruled to open the hearts of the congregation to receive his message.

The way in which the startling news that Brownlow North had become a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ struck his old friends may be gathered from a single instance of one who knew him well, and who was as rejoiced as he was amazed to hear it. The Rev. William Robertson, D.D., the esteemed pastor of New Greyfriars Parish Church, Edinburgh, thus writes: "My acquaintance with Brownlow North reaches back to the days of our youth, when in the year 1826 we met on the Continent, and travelled for a

short time in company. I will say nothing about his early life, as he has frequently in the pulpit taken the public into his confidence in reference to his character and habits in those days, and all who heard him know that in his confessions he did not spare himself, uniformly holding himself up as a remarkable example of the forbearing mercy of God, and the mighty power of His grace. A truly astonishing example he was! The first time I heard of his change of character and life was from a copy of the *British Messenger* which I found by accident in the coffee-room of an hotel in Hull, where I had just arrived from Rotterdam. Brownlow North preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ! Did my eyes deceive me? Could it be the same Brownlow North with whom I was so well acquainted? What could be the meaning of his preaching? Was it some mad or impious jest? What could have tempted him to this? Very naturally I had no belief in his sincerity until shortly afterwards we met in Edinburgh, when he recounted to me the remarkable history of his conversion. From that moment I never entertained a doubt that he was a truly converted man. I shall never forget an observation of his when he perceived the astonishment, perhaps mingled with doubt, with which I listened to his narrative of his conversion. 'I see you are filled with wonder, William,' he said to me, 'you are filled with wonder. But why should He not? *why should He not* lift the vile thing out of the dunghill?'