

BROWNLOW NORTH:

*THE STORY*

OF

*HIS LIFE AND WORK.*

BY THE REV.

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MOFFAT.

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V.

*WORK IN EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW, AND RECOGNITION AS AN  
EVANGELIST BY THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.*

“Wherefore I dare not, I, put forth my hand  
To hold the ark, although it seem to shake  
Through the old sinnes and new doctrines of our land.  
Only since God doth often vessels make  
Of lowly matter for high uses meet,  
I throw me at His feet.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

ON his arrival in Edinburgh, in the Spring of 1857, Mr. North at once called on my father, who thus relates his impressions on first meeting him:—

“‘You are not the kind of man I’m in the habit of seeing,’ was the thought that rose in my mind and almost to my lips, as my study door opened and a visitor was announced under the name of ‘Mr. Brown.’ ‘Who is Mr. Brown?’ was not just the thought that next occurred to me, for that was a question I had no hope of answering to myself, but what is Mr. Brown’s occupation? what may be his character? and what can be his object in calling on me? ‘A man of the world, yet not a man of the world,’ was the nearest guess I could make, when the mystery was solved by Mr. Brownlow North giving his own name, for he saw that I was puzzled; and the man before me did most exactly fit the associations I had attached to the name, as none else in the world could have done. Having heard that he was to be in Edinburgh, I had written to him, asking him to call on me; but I was not expecting him at the time, and I welcomed him with equal surprise and delight.

“At that first visit in Edinburgh we both engaged in prayer, and alike in prayer and in conversation it was impossible not to be deeply impressed with his reverential awe, his earnestness, and his tenderness of spirit. To myself it was unspeakably refreshing to find a man with such a fear of the living God, such brokenness of spirit, and such faith in the everlasting Word. It was a great acquisition, and reminded me of the saying of the first convert under Dr. Kalley’s teaching in the island of Madeira,—where so many hundreds afterwards forsook all for the sake of the gospel, but where for a long time there was only one man converted,—who after much patience came with a companion to his teacher, and said, ‘I have found a man!’ And on that day it seemed to me that I had found a man whom God was redeeming to Himself, was leading and instructing, and was sending as a skilful and faithful labourer into His harvest. From that day forward we were knit together in the bonds of a life-long friendship and affection.”

I can never forget my astonishment when my father told me that the fashionable-looking gentleman whom I had seen in conversation with him was to preach in our church on the evening of the following Lord's Day, and it took some time before I was convinced that there was not some mistake about the matter. It seemed as if things were being turned upside down.

In Edinburgh he preached, if we mistake not, first in the church of his old friend Dr. William Robertson, of New Greyfriars, who asked his congregation to assemble half an hour before the usual time to secure their places, and who says that when he entered the church, and looked round, he found that his precautionary advice to his flock had proved of no avail, as he could only observe some half-dozen of them who had been able to gain admittance, so great was the crowd, and so early had all the available space in his church been filled. He next preached in my father's church, Free St. Luke's, and a lady who went to hear him, from having had her curiosity excited by the accounts of his wonderful popularity in the North, gives her recollections of this sermon:

"Well do I remember that day when in the morning your father read Acts ix. 20-29 (the first preaching of the converted Saul of Tarsus), with the remark, 'How soon God can make a preacher!' and prayed that this newly raised-up preacher might have depths of repentance, as a safeguard against his great popularity. Mr. North preached in the evening with a power and originality which riveted all, even although such a statement as 'This church is full of devils' provoked in some a half-smile. Hundreds of times since that evening I have thanked him for his exhortation: 'You say that you pray; but when you kneel down with closed doors, will you believe that Jesus is actually at your side, desiring to bless you?' The incidents of his wonderful conversion were constantly reproduced, not through egotism, but to warn against slighting the motions of the Holy Spirit, or grieving Him away from us. Numbers of his gay friends came to hear him, and even if not converted, were forced to own that it was the finger of God. All who heard him felt that his power did not consist in the words of man's wisdom, but that he spoke what he had learned directly from God through the Word. How often I still turn over in my mind the exhortation so difficult to follow, 'Give self to Christ, and take Christ instead,' and this other constantly repeated text, 'God is,' which might be called his motto."

Francis Brown Douglas, Esq., ever afterwards through life his attached friend, gives the following recollections of the beginning of his work in that city:—

"His one object was preaching the Word and gaining souls to the Master. I do not particularly describe the number or character of his addresses, so earnest, so solemn, so faithful, so bringing before his audiences the evil

of sin and the way of pardon, and this out of the abundance of the heart, and free from conventional phrases to which we are so apt to become accustomed. Many a week-evening did we go with him to Free St. Luke's and join the large congregation; and many a Lord's Day when he was to preach did we see that division of Queen Street, where the church is literally crowded an hour before the time with expectant hearers, many of whom, after long waiting, had to go away disappointed, not being able to get admission.

"Each morning, during that time, our house had many visitors, Mr. North, who was our guest, meeting them by appointment made on the previous evening, and seeing them in succession. We did not know, nor do we know now, who these visitors were, but learned afterwards that several of our own acquaintances and friends had then come to see and converse with him, having received through him, as the instrument, Divine teaching and impression which remain to this day.

"It was not always that what he thought his best sermons were his most successful ones. Many godly ministers have stated their experience to be the same. One evening he preached from the text, 'Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope,' dwelling on each expression. When he came home, he said he had never felt more unfit to preach than that Sabbath evening; it was as if his thoughts were gone and his mind weak—no power at all in him; words would not come. Often he had more to say than he could get out, and was obliged to stop from exhaustion, but that night he stopped early, not because he was tired, but because he had nothing more to say. Yet he seldom had so many inquirers coming to speak to him as after that address. One young woman, he told us, burst into tears and said, 'O sir, when you said the devil was blinding our eyes and holding us down fast in chains, it went through me like an arrow; it was just my case.' On this occasion he showed us the following letter received the next day: 'Sir, excuse the liberty taken by a stranger in thus addressing you, and trespassing on your precious time; but you love to do good to the souls of your fellow-creatures. You requested the prayers of a praying people: may I, who have no one to pray for me, request your special prayer on my behalf, that God for Christ's sake would enlighten my darkened soul, take from me the hard and stony heart, give me a new heart and right spirit, and loose the chains that bind me to Satan? While listening to your solemn, beseeching address, the most fearful thoughts took possession of my soul, which if clothed in words would make the most hardened shudder. Oh, pray, pray that I may be converted, sanctified, saved. I am an orphan, and almost alone, with none to whom I can tell my sorrow of heart, and must still remain, a stranger even while making this urgent request. Yours 'respectfully.' I am not aware whether Mr. North discovered or made the acquaint-

ance of the writer.”

From Edinburgh he wrote to Miss Gordon, of Wardhouse, his impressions of the door that was opened to him in the Scottish capital.

“EDINBURGH, *Saturday*.

“MY BELOVED AUNTIE,—I really feel ashamed at not having written for so long, but indeed you would excuse me if you saw how I am pressed. I hardly know what to begin to tell you, but I *do* hope the Lord is with me. I have had to do with many awakened and anxious souls. May *He* own the work, and make the end to be true conversion of the heart to Him, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Doors upon doors have opened upon me, and the interest to hear seems on the increase still. Last Sabbath I was in Dr. Candlish’s; Monday, Charles Brown’s; Thursday, Moody-Stuart’s; tomorrow, if God wills (and if He does, may He *exceedingly bless*), Haldane’s old church at half-past two, and Moody-Stuart’s at night; Friday, Dr. Brown’s, United Presbyterian; and Sabbath, the 19th, by his own personal request, couched in language I should not like to repeat, at half-past two (his own usual service), in Dr. Guthrie’s. The wise, the mighty, the learned will all be there: may God be pleased to perfect His praise out of the mouth of me, a very babe in Christ, that am not worthy to be called a babe; but by the grace of God I am what I am, and I hope *by the will of God* I am *where* I am. Oh what a glorious honour! May I just do so much, and no more than He chooses! Letters have come up from Thurso to Sir George Sinclair, asking him to get me to go over there for the herring-fishing time, when thousands are gathered, and he has earnestly pressed it on me, so that I think it seems a duty to go. Believe me, with much Christian love,

“Your truly affectionate,

“B. NORTH.”

As the complement of the descriptions of his work on his first visit to Edinburgh thus given by himself and by Christian friends, we may quote a journalist’s impressions of the same visit published in March 1857:—

“Brownlow North, Esq., a connection of the great Lord North, and hitherto a gay and careless ‘man about town,’ has been preaching in various Free Church and Baptist pulpits during the week. On Sunday evening he held forth in Dr. Candlish’s church to one of the largest audiences it ever contained. He is a man apparently about forty years of age, as destitute of pulpit airs as when he was a leader of fashion and a keen hand for the turf: but in spite of his short shooting-coat, and the negligent tie, and the gold eye-glass dangling on the breast of his tightly-buttoned coat, there is tremendous energy and force in his preaching. There is something contagious in a man who is terribly in earnest. North begins his service with a low,

faltering voice; but before he has got half through the opening prayer, his breast begins to heave with a convulsive sobbing, his whole frame is agitated, and the tears stream over his cheeks. There is then no faltering. The words come quickly, and all the graces of a natural orator are developed. He becomes a great example of the truth that there is no teacher of elocution like the heart. When he implores the audience, with tears, to forget all about the messenger in the message; when he graphically sketches the position of the gay worldling, evidently picturing from experience, but scarcely ever alluding to his own past career; when he breaks out abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, with a radiant smile, and states the happy conviction that some souls are being saved; and when, with unaffected simplicity, he asks the prayers of the congregation on his own behalf, that he may be supported in the extraordinary position in which he finds himself, no unprejudiced spectator can doubt that he is a man in earnest, and that we may yet expect to hear great things of the work which he has begun. The spectacle of such a man in the Presbyterian pulpit is unique. There is a significance in his appearance at this time which affects the future of the Church. As a spur to the regularly educated and regularly appointed ministers, and as a powerful living commentary on some of their most prevalent and fatal defects, Brownlow North seems destined to exercise a wide influence as a reformer. He has the good wishes of every one who has heard him; and Edinburgh is flocking in thousands to his gatherings in the Tabernacle and elsewhere, to see the strange sight of a godless man of sport and fashion transformed into a fiery, weeping messenger of the Cross.”

One night, in preaching to young men in St. Luke’s Church, he had spoken with more than usual power from Matt. vi. 6, and solemnly charged them all to go straight home and pray to Him “who is in secret,” with the undoubting assurance of His presence in their closets, and of the certainty of His listening to their prayer. A few days afterwards a young man of perhaps twenty-two years of age called on Dr. Moody-Stuart to express his gratitude for that sermon as the means of his salvation. Under the impression of Mr. North’s closing words, and with a deep sense of the nearness of the living God, he left the church with the fixed resolution of casting himself down on his knees as soon as he reached his room. But the house was at some distance, and as he walked through the silent and lonely streets in the dark night, he said within himself, “Why need I delay so long? Why need I go to my closet to find my Father who is in secret? Is He not here in this solitude, as much as there? and may I not find Him now as well as then? “And with the sense of God all around him he knelt down quickly on the cold and hard pavement, and did not rise from his knees till he found that God is near to all that call upon Him; and like the publican of old, “he

went down to his house justified” through faith in Christ Jesus.

After he had left Edinburgh we find a letter to him from Mrs. Stuart, of Annat, dated 24th April, 1857, in which she writes:—

“Your visit to Edinburgh has been a season of refreshing to many, and I trust *that* day will declare that not a few have in consequence been translated out of darkness into marvellous light. How gracious is our God in having made you a savour of Christ here! Oh, may He keep you humble and watchful, and feeling continually that your sufficiency is of God! We had a visit from Mrs. H.’s little governess. Her face was so bright, that I greeted her by saying, ‘I don’t need to ask how you feel, for your countenance bespeaks peace.’ She called, poor thing, to thank us for our kind reception that day when she was in deep waters. I do think she has got a lesson from you to cease from poring over self, and rather to keep gazing on Him who is made unto His people righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Commending you to the God of all grace, and praying that He may bless you and keep you, and cause the light of His countenance to shine upon you,

“I am, ever yours in the Lord,

“JESSIE STUART.”

It was probably of the young lady here referred to that Mr. North remarked to a friend at this time, “Her face is just like April, sunshine after showers,” so sweetly had the shining of the Sun of Righteousness dispelled the cloud of her weeping.

The Hon. Miss Mackenzie, of Seaforth, in a few lines written in her old age and blindness, on 1st May, 1857, sent him the Levitical benediction of Numbers vi. 24-26: “The Lord bless thee and keep thee,” etc. “I wished to send these sweet words of blessing to dear Mr. Brownlow North, with a few words of grateful remembrance, but my blind eyes will not serve. Is not that a sweet word?—

‘The Lord will light my candle, so that it shall shine full bright,  
The Lord my God will also make my darkness to be light.’

PSALM xviii. 28.

May it be yours, and many, many souls be given you. Pray for me, dear friend!

“Yours affectionately in the Lord,

“CHARLOTTE MACKENZIE.”

Before leaving Edinburgh he thought it right to make an insurance on his life in favour of his wife, for whom, in the days of his dissipation and vice, he had made no provision. Accordingly he went to an Insurance Of-

fice, and considerably startled the officials when they put to him the usual question, whether he knew of anything that might shorten his life, by the prompt and naive reply, "Oh yes, I feel that I may not live for an hour!" Ever since his awakening, he was under the impression that his life would be very short. However, after being examined, the medical man certified that his fears were groundless; and on his return he said to my father, "Only think, Moody-Stuart, the doctor says that I may live till I am seventy, that is twenty years; and how many souls I may be the means of saving in that time!" It so happened in God's providence that he was spared to spend exactly twenty years in preaching the gospel.

After finishing a season of fruitful evangelistic labour in the Scottish metropolis, he was invited to Glasgow, and was as highly appreciated and blessed among the teeming population of that great commercial and industrial emporium. The general effects of his preaching may be gathered from the notices in the city newspapers, which are in the same strain as the journals already quoted.

In one of them a full report is given of his discourse upon the Parable of the Sower, which was afterwards published as a tract by Morgan and Scott, London, to which we refer our readers. The report continues: "The discourse occupied above an hour. After giving out the intimations of his further services, he for some fifteen minutes most solemnly and urgently addressed the audience, especially those who had never thought seriously of their salvation. He advised them to favour him thus far, to give ten minutes daily to prayer and to reading God's Word, and to remember that when they read the Bible God was speaking to them, and that when they prayed they were speaking to God. He then pronounced the benediction, and the immense audience dispersed at a few minutes past ten, many having been above three hours in the densely crowded house." The journal then devotes another column to a judicious review of his preaching and the secret of its astonishing popularity and power. The writer attributes it first to the thoroughly evangelical cast of his preaching, which Mr. North himself often remarked was a powerful attraction, saying that the more faithfully and simply the gospel is preached, the greater will be the crowd that will come to listen; and next to the fact that his theology was scriptural rather than scholastic, drawn from the Bible more than from Confessions. The article further draws attention, and rightly, to the great strength and shrewdness of mind that were apparent in his discourses, to the correctness and aptness of his quotation of Scripture, and to his use of popular language, and a style which was pointed, vigorous, and telling.

The work appears to have been as full of permanence as of promise: indeed, the stability of those converted under his instrumentality was everywhere very marked. His preaching was much blessed in the Rev. Alexan-

der Cumming's congregation, who says that many of his young communicants in 1857 and 1858 spoke of him as the instrument of their conversion.

In November 1872 he wrote to Mr. North, "You never preached in Gorbals Church without permanent results; this one and that one was born there. I have attended several of those who were brought to Christ under your labours when on their deathbeds, and they not only gave the clearest evidence of grace, but showed unusual serenity in death. One woman I attended long in Cumberland Street, who often spoke of the saving benefit she derived from you. She died in great triumph and in the cloudless anticipation of immortal blessedness. Some who had mere convictions under your labours fell away like the stony-ground hearers, but not one whom I really judged to be a converted person."

Other ministers could give a somewhat similar report of the result of his faithful and heart-searching preaching in their respective congregations, and the most valuable testimony is not that which was spontaneously offered a few months after the services had been held, but that which thus attests their effects after the lapse of fifteen or twenty years, a period of time sufficient to serve as a pretty sure test; for time, as well as fire, tries every man's work of what sort it is. The results of his first visits to Paisley, Greenock, Rothesay, and other towns in the Western district of Scotland were of a similar encouraging and impressive character. From one of these towns he wrote to an old and much interested friend describing the work in which he was engaged.

"34, UNION STREET, GREENOCK, *Monday*.

"I received your letter, my dearest auntie, with much pleasure, and though I have a very large correspondence, and headache to boot, will, God willing, send you a few lines.

"You will be glad to hear that I have every reason to hope that my more than merciful God and Saviour is daily forgiving me all my blunders and wickedness, and blessing the words of His truth that He enables me to speak. It would take sheets and days to write you anything like a detailed account of the appearances of good in Glasgow; and since I have left they have been, I think, fully proportionate in other places. In S., where I was staying for a week, preaching in the neighbourhood, the six-foot-two London butler was two mornings in my bedroom, before I was up, on his knees in prayer, and has been over here today to see me, still in the same mind; and the same spirit appears to have aroused that house, from the mistress to the dairy-maid, which latter sent for me after I had retired to my room for the night, to come to speak with her, on the evening preceding my leaving. God willing, I go back there on Thursday for a week, and then to Edinburgh, to preach in Moody-Stuart's on the 14th. In Rothesay, too, the appearances were most encouraging. To God be ALL the glory,

ALL the thanks. Let us not limit Him. His goodness is overpowering; but *'it is just like Him.'* Last night I preached in one of the Established churches here; tomorrow, God willing, in the Free Middle Church; on Thursday, Dr. MacCulloch's, Established. The Established are opening much more freely since Norman Macleod opened his church to me. I am much pleased with all the letters I get from C. D.; still I feel very anxious about her. I wish the dear Duchess would ask her to Huntly Lodge. I trust her cold is better. Give her my warmest Christian regards.

"Dearest Auntie, I have much to write and think about. All the doctors are crying, 'Rest, rest.' May the Lord Jesus Christ keep us, soul and body, to His own glory and the good of our fellows! We are *not* our own. Love.

"Your affectionate

"BROWNLOW NORTH."

Regarding the results of his work in the town of Rothesay, we refer our readers to the letter of the Rev. Dr. Elder in chapter xi. His ministry in the West proved as popular and attractive as it had been in the North. In Lochwinnoch, where, in consequence of heavy rains, the road connecting the village with the district lying on the south side of Castle Semple Loch and Barr Loch was covered for some hundred yards with several feet of water, two hundred persons from that quarter appeared at the meeting notwithstanding this obstacle, having got across the flood by walking along the top of the wall on the roadside. The singularity of this long procession of serious and solemnized worshippers going homewards in the still, gloomy night, marching in single file and with cautious steps along the narrow path of stone, on either side of which lay a wide waste of waters, is well remembered by many in the parish to this day. The impressions produced here also on many hearers were profound and permanent.

Mr. North owed a great deal to the friendships which he formed with many of the most honoured and most deeply experienced of the Lord's dear children throughout the length of Scotland, who gave him a most hearty welcome from the very outset of his ministry, and threw open to him both their hearts and their homes. The most honoured and blest ministers, alike in town and country, invited him to their pulpits, and guided him by their experienced counsel; while others, like the saintly Duchess of Gordon and the beloved Christian ladies whose letters have just been quoted, gave him direction in a more private manner,—and no man was more willing to learn from the very humblest of the Lord's chosen ones than was Brownlow North. But besides these, at this time he formed acquaintance and friendship with a number of devoted Christian gentlemen, with time and means at their disposal, who became his cordial fellow-labourers in the work of the Lord. He owed much to them, and they in turn owed much

to him.

This band of evangelising Elders was a distinguished one, and its members did not belong exclusively to any one of the branches into which, by the progress of events, the Scottish Church had unhappily been divided, and out of which we may cherish the hope that it may ere long once more be reconstructed. Men of ability, energy, and intellectual power, some of them men of wide influence in the counties where they held property, others successful professional men, they were all filled with love to the Lord, and fired with zeal for His glory, and for the welfare of their fellow-men, and they consecrated their means, their influence, their time, their gift of public speaking, to the Lord, whom they reckoned it an honour as well as a delight to serve. They all held and proclaimed the same doctrines, viz., those of the Reformation. Eternity alone will reveal what their devotedness and activity have accomplished in Scotland. They have proved a very valuable gift to the Church from her exalted Head, and one which we trust may be continued.

Mr. North's work had now attained such proportions as to claim some public recognition at the hands of the Church in Scotland. Within little more than a year from the time when, as he once said in his own pithy language to a little gathering of young men, he "took Brownlow North from his comfortable seat beside the fire, where he was reading some religious book, and crucified him at the bedside of some poor bed-ridden women," he found himself overwhelmed with invitations to give addresses as the most popular preacher in Scotland.

A Christian relative of his, foreseeing such an issue as possible, and dreading the effects of success upon his spirituality of mind, had rather dissuaded him at the outset from preaching, reminding him that when he used to frequent the hunt, it was "first North, and then the hounds," and that while he might similarly excel as a preacher, it might prove injurious to him. But by God's grace he was to a marked extent preserved from the snare of pride, and while he was not without faults, he was characterised to an unusual degree by the grace of humility.

Several circumstances combined, in the providence of God, to render the position which Mr. North occupied before the Christian public, for nearly twenty years, unique in its influence upon the community.

The fact that he was a layman, and not a minister, was one of these. Before his day laymen had done invaluable service to the Church of Christ, and the advancement of His cause in Scotland. Not a few very distinguished laymen had been raised up by the great Head of the Church in our beloved land, men who occupied as high a position in society, who were as truly devoted to the Master, who gave up much that they might obey that Master's call, men of higher intellectual acquirements, if not of so high

mental force and calibre; but there were none of these, except the brothers Haldane, whose influence upon the spiritual state of the community as a whole was for a moment to be compared with that of Brownlow North. These noble men were raised up in the different branches into which the Scottish Church had in process of time become divided: the greater number of them were found within the pale of the Free Church of Scotland, through the events that shook the Scottish Church to its inmost core, and culminated in the ever-memorable Disruption of that Church in 1843. Their influence, however, was confined, at least during their lives, almost wholly within the bounds of the denominations to which they severally belonged, and their efforts were directed mainly to the defence and propagation of such great truths and principles as were identified with the public testimony of the Church to which they adhered. From the fact that he was trained in none of the sections of the Scottish Church, but as an Englishman, and the son of an English rector, in the Church of England, Brownlow North obtained and held a position which gave him access to the congregations of each of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches. His membership in his own Church he never relinquished, although in his work in Scotland he became thoroughly associated with Presbyterians, whose form of worship, and Church government, and doctrinal views, he greatly admired and loved. His position gave him a powerful vantage-ground for good, and was recognized by him most thankfully as a talent entrusted to his care by his great Master, and used most humbly and most prudently.

The work to which the other distinguished Scotch Christian gentlemen were called, and for which they were fitted by their Lord with needful gifts and grace, related more directly to the extension of the visible than of the invisible Church, to the organization of Sabbath schools, of missionary agencies, of Bible and Tract societies, and even of great Churches. When they addressed the public, it was either through the agency of the press, or in church courts, and they addressed their audience not on the great theme of salvation so much as on some of the collateral themes which are its bulwarks. They did indeed concern themselves with matters which most churches allocate almost entirely to ordained ministers, such as Church government, discipline, and rule, while Mr. North took up the work of an evangelist, and confined himself to the announcement of the gospel message of salvation. He did the work and occupied the position of Apollos in the early church, who was “an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures; and being fervent in the spirit, he began to preach boldly in the synagogue; and when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote exhorting the disciples to receive him.”—Acts xviii. 24-27.

Mr. North’s views on the right and duty of laymen, possessed of the needful gifts and grace, to proclaim to their fellow-men in public address,

as well as in private conversation, the glad tidings of salvation through the Great Redeemer, were clear and decided. In his annotated Bible he draws attention to Acts viii. 1, where it is written that after Stephen's death, through stress of persecution, the disciples "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles,*" and verse 4, "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word;" and he adds, "Surely this is in itself sufficient warrant for lay preaching. What the Christians spoken of in the fourth verse did is clearly the duty of every Christian. The Apostles were not even among the preachers; every member of the Church was a preacher in these days." He refers to the same subject continued in Acts xi. 19-21, where it is stated, that "they that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Antioch, preaching the word, and preaching the Lord Jesus; and the hand of the Lord was with them, so that a great number believed;" and notes, "The success of all work for God depends on this, the hand of the Lord being with us. These preachers had no ordination from man; because the hand of the Lord was with them, these lay-preachers turned many."

But, on the other hand, his views as to the value and the divine institution and authority of a regularly ordained ministry were no less clear and no less strong. He writes: "Let no one for a moment suppose that I in the least intend to teach that a stated ministry is unnecessary. God forbid. I believe that, next to His Word and His Spirit, a minister taught by the Holy Ghost is the best gift God has to give us." At the opening of his Mission Hall in Elgin he said that he was perfectly convinced that by working with the ministers an evangelist got an enormous advantage. He did not like to say it was impossible to do good without the clergy, for God was sovereign, and He would do what He willed; but he would rather run away to another place, and try to do good where the clergy would go with him, than set up in opposition to them. He upheld the ordained ministry with all his power, honouring them on account of the honour of their Master and the honourable nature of their work. While of course he could not cooperate with worldly and godless ministers, and used in private often to warn his converts of the danger and the damage to their souls of sitting under an unconverted minister, or one who did not feed their souls with any spiritual food, he never indulged in those general and sweeping denunciations of ministers, or of large classes of ministers, which have too often been uttered by many devoted and useful lay-evangelists, and which have irritated congregations and ministers who, by a more wise and forbearing conduct, might have been conciliated, and not improbably benefited, through their zeal-inspiring services. Mr. North always remembered that the wrath of man cannot work the righteousness of God, and he never al-

lowed private slights, or even personal opposition, to dictate or to tincture any of his public utterances. The grace of God, along with natural prudence, and an overpowering sense of his own responsibility for every word uttered in His name to saints or sinners to that Master who is the Judge of all His servants, and to whom alone they stand or fall, kept him from forming hasty judgments in this matter, and from giving rash expression to them even when they were formed deliberately. But as a general rule for all, he used very solemnly both in public and private to say; "Do not sit under a lifeless ministry."

Frank outspokenness could not demand more, and fidelity to souls, and to the God of souls, could demand no less. Ministers have no reason to be jealous of laymen who share his spirit, even though they may not share his talent. The evils attending undirected lay-preaching, of censoriousness, excitement, spiritual pride, and divisions, will be checked by firm and wise control, better than by opposition or suppression. But the laymen who are working harm at present and are likely to work more, are not lay-preachers to the perishing, who have usually proved intensely conservative in their views of truth, but those lay-writers on religion in Reviews, in Magazines, and in Newspapers, whose divergences from the received doctrine are not inadvertent but intentional, not trivial but fundamental and whose aim is not to publish and defend the saving truths of Revelation, but to extend the domain of reason, and overthrow the fortresses of the faith. The Church has urgent need of laymen like Hugh Miller in the press, as well as of laymen like Brownlow North upon the platform.

At the same time, while Mr. North began his labours simply as a lay-evangelist, his university education for the Church of England, his ability as a theologian, and his power as a preacher made him occupy quite a unique position, while in some other respects also his qualifications were exceptional.

A strong desire now began to be felt in various quarters that Mr. North should receive formal Church recognition as an evangelist. Nor is this to be wondered at, especially in view of the parentage of Scottish Presbyterianism.

All the Scottish Churches were scions of the old Reformation Church of Scotland, which in her order of "Exhorters" and "Readers" had embedded in her very constitution a recognition of the right of unordained men who were called and fitted by God's Spirit, to preach the gospel and to exhort the people in an orderly method. Their mother-Church in this had moulded the outlines of her polity in harmony with apostolic practice and precept; and the Church of the Apostles had recognized the right of laymen to preach the word, as the older Jewish Church of the synagogue had assigned to it a definite place many generations before.

The desire to recognize Mr. North as a preacher took definite form within the Free Church. It was both fitting and advantageous that this should be the case, for not only had this Church thrown herself with enormous energy, from the very period of her separation from the State in 1843, into the work of evangelising the country, and from his first appearance had given a very cordial and general, though unofficial, welcome to this distinguished preacher, whom her exalted Head was so greatly owning in the spiritual harvest-field, but at this period she embraced within her pale many of the most widely known, most learned, and most acute divines in Scotland. Having then in her Church councils such master-theologians as Principal Cunningham, Dr. Duncan, Dr. Candlish, Principal Fairbairn, all now removed to the general assembly of the church of the firstborn above, but whose praise will long remain in all the churches, and such experienced Church jurists as Sir Henry Wellwood Moncreiff, and Mr. Murray-Dunlop, and holding a conservative position in the eyes of Presbyterian Christendom, it was clear that whatever action she might take in this matter would bid fair to meet with the approbation of all the English-speaking Presbyterian Churches in the world.

The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland met in Edinburgh in May 1859, under the moderatorship of the revered Principal Cunningham, and an "overture" was prepared to be submitted to it for the recognition of Mr. North as an Evangelist. By this ecclesiastical action Mr. North was taken out of the category of lay-preachers strictly so called. He jocularly said immediately after to a youthful member of my father's family, who happened to smile at some remark he had made, "Why, sir, are you laughing at me? Do you not know that I am now a probationer of the Free Church of Scotland?" His studies at Oxford enabled the Church, without scruple, now formally to admit him to her pulpits. But while this was the case, the words "welcome him as an evangelist," in the resolution of the Assembly, recognized his right to engage in evangelistic labours previously to his having received this formal recognition.

Although my father was not himself a member of the Assembly of 1859, the burden of taking the necessary steps to procure an object which he, along with many others, felt to be eminently desirable, fell mainly upon him. The result of his conferences with the brethren was that on the 25th of May, 1859, there was laid upon the table of the Supreme Court, what is termed in Scottish ecclesiastical phraseology, an "overture," asking the Assembly to appoint a committee to meet with Mr. North, and report as to his views on the great essential truths of salvation, and, should they be satisfied with these, that the Assembly should formally welcome and sanction him in the labours which he had been carrying on in the land for the three previous years with manifold tokens of the Divine blessing.

The overture was signed by sixty-eight ministers and thirty-eight elders.

The Assembly Hall of the Free Church of Scotland, at the head of The Mound in Edinburgh, has been the scene of many intensely interesting deliberations and decisions, which have influenced the progress of the Church of Christ alike in Scotland and in distant lands. Those who have been present on any of the occasions when momentous issues were at stake, whether in regard to the defence or the propagation of the truth, will carry with them through life impressions that can never be effaced from the tablet of remembrance. And the day on which the General Assembly deliberated as to its course with regard to the recognition of this evangelist, whom the Head of the Church was so extensively blessing to the awakening of souls, will rank, in the recollection of all who witnessed it, among the memorable scenes that have taken place in a Hall consecrated by many sacred and inspiring memories. Many of those who addressed the Assembly on this occasion, or who signed the memorial, are already gathered within the church of the redeemed above.

The adoption of this overture was fitly moved by Dr. Julius Wood, of Dumfries, a man as deeply imbued with compassion for perishing souls as he was tender of his Master's honour, and whose venerable and fragile figure was long prominent on the platform of the Assembly in all deliberations regarding the progress of the Saviour's kingdom in our land.

A Committee, consisting of all the Theological Professors, along with Drs. Beith, Candlish, and Wood, was appointed to converse with Mr. North, and to report as to the soundness of his doctrinal views.

On Friday the 27th May, the Report of this Committee was given in, which stated that having met with Mr. North they had heard from him a clear and detailed account of his views of the great essential truths of salvation, as well as a narrative of the way in which he was led to engage in evangelistic work, and of the steps of his subsequent progress therein, and embodied a unanimous and cordial recommendation that the Assembly should welcome him as a friend of the Saviour, who had been in a remarkable way conducted into his present course by the hand of God, and whom He had eminently qualified for addressing his fellow-sinners on the things which belong to their everlasting peace.

Professor Gibson, D.D., whose conscientious jealousy for soundness in the faith was proverbial, stated that he had never on any occasion heard a more distinct, simple, and lucid statement of the great doctrines of grace, first, in relation to the condition of man as a sinner in the sight of God, dead in trespasses and sins, and as to the sovereignty of God in the election of grace; and secondly, as to the method of a sinner's justification, solely and entirely through the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and thirdly, in reference to the perpetual obligation lying even upon the

sinner to obey the law of God, and the binding and unchangeable nature of that obligation upon the believer, and the duty of the believer, in gratitude and love to God, to show it forth in his life and conduct. Nor had he ever heard a more clear statement of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the condition of man as a sinner, utterly unable and indisposed to anything good till renewed by the Spirit of God. He closed by remarking that Mr. North's case was another testimony added to such instances as those of Hervey, Newton, Scott, and Simeon, proving that when these doctrines of grace are rightly preached, they may be preached in entire consistency with the fullest freedom in proclaiming the gospel.

During the interesting proceedings the proposal formally to recognize Mr. North was warmly advocated by many of the most distinguished ministers of the Church, such as Dr. Candlish, Dr. Beith, Dr. Begg, as well as by representative men among her Elders, such as Professor Miller, Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Brown-Douglas.

The motion was unanimously agreed to, and Mr. North came forward to the table of the House amidst loud and general applause.

The Moderator, Principal Cunningham, then addressed Mr. North in the name of the Assembly,—and it was most fitting that this important duty should devolve on one whose vast erudition, mastery of theological controversies and clear judgment gave peculiar significance and weight to all his utterances. He said—“Mr. North, I have great pleasure and heartfelt satisfaction in announcing to you that I have been called, by the unanimous decision of this House, to recognize and welcome you as a servant of Jesus Christ who has received unusual gifts for preaching the glad tidings of great joy, and whose work in this department the Lord has greatly honoured. The General Assembly has come to this decision, I believe, in full knowledge, and on deliberate consideration. I concur heartily with the grounds on which this judgment has been adopted. I never could see the warrantableness of any Church of Christ venturing to lay down as a resolution that she would not see, and would not recognize, gifts for preaching or for the ministry, except in men who had gone through the whole of the ordinary curriculum. No Church has a right to lay down that rule. This Church has not laid down that rule, and I trust never will. The Church must lay herself open to consider exceptional cases, to mark God's hand, and to make a fair use and application of what He has been doing. I believe, if we leave an opening for occasional exceptions, it will be of more importance in enabling us to maintain a high standard and full compliance with our strict regulations in regard to nineteen-twentieths of our students, than by attempting to carry out the same rule to the whole twenty-twentieths, and thereby running the risk of lowering the standard of the whole body, and losing, besides, the benefit of the exceptions. I have very great pleasure,

Mr. North, in tendering you the right hand of fellowship, and in recognizing and welcoming you as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as highly honoured by your Master in your work. And perhaps you will allow me to say that your position is a somewhat peculiar one,—that while you have eminent gifts, there are, of course, difficulties and temptations to which, in your position you are exposed. I have no doubt you will feel that you stand deeply in need of wisdom and guidance and discretion; and I have no doubt you will feel that, amid all the encouragement you have had, you have still much cause to wait upon God, and walk humbly with Him. I have great pleasure in tendering to you the right hand of fellowship, and in welcoming you to this General Assembly.”<sup>1</sup>

The Moderator, on concluding his speech, gave Mr. North the right hand of fellowship, amid loud and general applause. This was also done by Sir Henry Moncreiff, Drs. Beith, Grierson, Wood, and others.

Mr. North, who appeared deeply affected, and spoke with difficulty at the outset of his remarks, then addressed the House as follows:—“The Lord says, ‘How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?’ Now, I think that at this moment I have received an honour such as it is impossible to exceed. For me to have been sitting in this House, and listening to the language I have been hearing, and to have been welcomed as I have been welcomed,—nothing can exceed the weight of all these things,—language cannot express that which I feel put upon me at this moment. And I do earnestly request the prayers of this Assembly, that what the Moderator so kindly and affectionately put me in mind that I require, may be granted to me. One of my own prayers has been, from almost the first day that I prayed at all, that I might receive marvellous grace, and marvellous grace to bear the marvellous grace. I remember walking with Mr. Davidson of Dallas, upwards of three years ago, and telling him that this was my prayer. He was the first minister that ever asked me to speak in his church, and is now present, a member of this Assembly. Had God ceased, when I was preaching to two hundred people in a barn at Elgin (and that was nearly four years ago), to raise me higher, He had then gone far beyond anything that in my wildest dream I ever imagined or expected. To find myself where I am at this moment, I can only say I trust and believe it is the Lord’s doing, but it is marvellous in our eyes. Dr. Candlish told me yesterday, that I would probably be asked to say a few words today, and that it would be on the subject of the state of religion in Scotland. I have had an opportunity, during the last three years, of seeing much of the religious state of the country; and I have

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<sup>1</sup> A full report of the Moderator’s Address as well as of all the speeches on this occasion is given in the larger volume—“Records and Recollections,” pp. 147-164.

come to this conclusion, that although we are, by God's grace, gathering many prisoners out of the chains of sin and Satan, still it is but one of a city and two of a family, and that the whole world is no better now than in the days of the apostle, when he said it was *lying in wickedness*. Now, dear friends, by the help of God's Spirit, how much might not you, who are now before me, effect in leavening this putrid mass of iniquity?

"I believe there are *four special things* for which God is very angry with the land, and for which His Holy Spirit is so little among us. *First*, the neglect of united prayer—the *appointed means of bringing down the Holy Spirit*, I say it, because I believe it, that the Scotch, with all their morality so-called, and all their outward decency, respectability, and love of preaching, are not a praying people. Take the Presbyterian Churches,—I am not speaking of the Free Church, the Established Church, or any other Church,—take the Churches of the land, and you find congregations of from 1,400, to 1,600 on Sabbaths, and at the prayer-meetings on Tuesdays you find thirty, forty, fifty, and sixty people. Sirs, is not this the truth? The neglect of prayer proves, to my mind, that there is a large amount of *practical infidelity*. If people believed that there was a real, existing, personal God, they would ask Him for what they wanted, and they would get what they asked. But they do not ask, because they do not believe or expect to receive. Why do I say this? Because I want to get Christians to remember, that though preaching is one of the great means appointed by God for the conversion of sinners, yet, unless God give the increase, Paul may plant and Apollos may water in vain; and God says He will be inquired of. O ministers! excuse me, you gave me this chance of speaking,—urge upon your people to come to the prayer-meeting. O Christians! go more to prayer-meetings than you do. And when you go to the prayer-meeting, try and realize more that there is *use in prayer*.

"*Secondly*, I do not believe that there is a more effective system in Christendom for the promotion of true religion than the Presbyterian system, *if it was carried out*. But the machinery, is not worked. Look at the mass of elders there are in the Presbyterian Church. But what are these elders doing as a body? Blessed be God, there are many holy, self-denying, godly men, who seek not their own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's, and who go into the lanes and alleys of the cities, and pray, and speak, and try to lead people to God. But do the elders, *as a body*, do that? How many elders are there in Edinburgh? Say there are a thousand. If these thousand elders would go forth and try to promote the glory of Jesus Christ and the good of souls, what salt, light, and leaven might they be to the whole community! But I believe there are elders—it is possible there may be such in this very Assembly—who know that God, who searcheth their hearts, sees that from week to week, and from month to month, they

never make a single attempt to do anything for the glory of Jesus Christ, and such must give an account to God at the last day.

“The *third* point I have seldom or never heard touched upon, because, perhaps, men hardly know how to alter it, but I believe it lies at the very heart’s core of the irreligion of the land; and it is this,—in the Church of England, and in all the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, and I doubt not, in all other bodies, men are brought up from childhood to say that they are going into the Church—men are put to college and educated for the Church, and men in England are brought before their bishops, and in Scotland before their Presbyteries, and without any fear of being struck dead for committing the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, they swear in my Church, they state in yours, that they believe they are called by the Holy Ghost to the ministry, and that they enter it out of a desire to promote the salvation of the souls of their fellow-creatures; *and they know when they say it they tell a lie*. I say there are multitudes of instances of this: even in this Assembly there may be those who know that they have been guilty of this fearful sin—for even among the twelve apostles there was a Judas—even in this Assembly there may be those who have even now no reason to believe that they have been born again of the Spirit, and who are nothing but hireling shepherds. Oh, if there be, I implore you to conceive your position! If it was a dreadful thing for the rich man to think of the entrance of his five brethren into hell, knowing how their reproaches would increase his torments, what will the entrance of your congregations into hell be to you? How will you bear their reproaches? Think of it! The day of judgment will come, and if you know in your hearts that you are not yet converted, and are not really labouring for souls, as those called of God to labour, oh, follow the advice that Peter gave to Simon Magus—confess your sins to God, pray for pardon and the Holy Spirit, and for the baptism of that fire which can yet enable you to awake the dead around you; and then, instead of being lost for ever, you may yet appear before God in glory with many children which may still be given you. Now, could there not be some test in the Churches—some practical proof of the new birth—something requiring an evidence of fruit—before men are sent into the ministry merely because they have passed certain examinations, and have an outward decent, respectable, moral character? Even supposing that ministers were to fail numerically by so doing, and there were not sufficient ministers to supply the Churches, would not such a want be likely to make the people reflect, and send them in prayer to God for a godly minister? Brethren, bear with me. I do not presume upon my position: but if I lose this opportunity of speaking, no man can tell if I will ever have the like again. I asked God this morning to bless me, and to give me a word that should be blessed to you.

“*Lastly*, the very best amongst us are exceedingly guilty in neglecting the apostolic injunction to be instant ‘*out of season.*’ How solemn is the introduction to the command, *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing,*—‘I charge thee’—what? ‘*Be instant in season, out of season.*’ Now, we can all speak when we are expected in the pulpit, in the prayer-meeting, or at the family altar, but are we faithful *out of season*? I feel convinced if the godly minister would prayerfully commence a system of individual, faithful, personal dealing with his people in their own houses, speaking as one who was in earnest, and beseeching men not to rest in a mere form of godliness, but to be content with nothing short of God’s Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they were born again, that he would very soon see of the fruit of his labour, and have reason to bless God and take courage. We need more *out-of-season work*, more talking to people apart in private as to the state of their souls.”

Mr. North concluded, amidst applause, by thanking the Assembly for the honour done him, and expressing his hope that he might never give them any reason to regret it.

The Assembly then engaged in prayer, that the Divine blessing might rest upon his labours.

By this ecclesiastical action Mr. North’s sphere of usefulness was greatly extended. In consequence of his now being a formally recognized, though unordained preacher, he obtained free access to the Churches of all the Presbyterian denominations in Scotland, England, and Ireland.

What was in one sense the climax of Mr. North’s success was now reached when he gained for lay-effort a place and an express recognition such as it had not obtained since the period immediately succeeding the Reformation. This alone would secure for his name a lasting place in the religious history of our country. He takes rank not merely as a very successful evangelist, but as the father of evangelists in our day, as the leader and pioneer of what has proved a very notable movement.