

Life and Labours  
OF  
DUNCAN MATHESON,  
*THE SCOTTISH EVANGELIST.*

BY THE  
REV. JOHN MACPHERSON.

“REALITY IS THE GREAT THING: I HAVE ALWAYS SOUGHT REALITY.”

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CHAPTER I.

*BIRTH AND BOYHOOD.*

**D**uncan Matheson was born at Huntly, in Aberdeenshire, on the 22nd day of November, 1824. This little inland town, some of my readers may not know, is the capital of Strathbogie, a district now famous in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland as the scene of a fierce conflict, some thirty years ago, between the church and the civil power. The fame of that struggle has sounded far beyond the shores of Scotland, and its issues are constantly growing more momentous with the revolving years.

Neither the village nor the adjacent country presents features very striking or interesting. The soil is not of a generous nature; but its sons have developed the sturdiest manhood in its subjugation and culture. The climate, rigorously stern, is often in winter of arctic severity; but the keen biting winds seem only to have sharpened the people's wits; the gloomy sky if it has made them *dour* has helped to make them sober-minded, and battling with storms and drifting snows has proved a good training for the battle of life. Bannocks of oatmeal and bickers of porridge, together with early and successful contendings with that great army of strong truths whose leader presents to every young Scot this memorable challenge, "What is the chief end of man?" have contributed not a little in raising up generations of strong, free men, able to push their way and hold their own anywhere in the world. In fact, hard work, coarse but wholesome fare, a severe climate, the Bible, the church, the school, and the catechism, have conspired to develop in them the tougher elements of the Scottish character. The inhabitants of that north-eastern province are as hard as their native granite, as stern as their own winter, and of a spirit as independent as the winds that play on the summit of their lofty Benachie. In short, the people of Huntly are Aberdonians of the most Aberdonian type. Shrewd, hard-headed, rough-grained, having ever a keen eye to the main chance, and not to be overcome by force or overreached by fraud, they are a people pre-eminently *canny* and Scotch.

In one of the plain homely dwellings, of which the Huntly of that day was almost entirely composed, the subject of this memoir first saw the light. His parents belonged to that better class of the common people whose intel-

ligence, industry, thrift, God-fearing uprightness, and honest pride, have contributed so much to the prosperity and glory of their country. From his father, a Ross-shire man, connected with a family of some note in that county, young Matheson inherited the Celtic fire which fused all his powers into one great passion; whilst from his mother he seemed to derive the strong good sense, the irrepressible wit, and boundless generosity, that were among his chief characteristics. To his mother, indeed, as in the case of many other men who in their day have been powerful workers of good and uncompromising enemies of evil, the boy, the man, and the Christian, owed more than pen and ink can set forth. Her loving and fervent spirit, her wise and gracious ways, impressed and captivated the warm-hearted and ingenuous boy; her prayers issued in his conversion after her gentle head had been pillowed among the clods; and her lovely memory glowing in his fancy became a force, not the less mighty for its gentleness, throughout his life. So true-hearted mothers often live in their strong sons, the little quiet rivulet somehow begetting the great broad river. Strong-willed and even wayward as was the boy, he loved and revered his mother with singular devotion.

The father, who for nearly thirty years occupied the humble but honourable post of mail-sunner between Huntly and Banff, enjoyed but a slender income; and it needed all the diligence and thrift of the mother to keep the house and five little children above want. They had their pinching times; but pinching times have done much, under God, to develop the real strength of Scottish character. In after years, when Duncan Matheson had taken up his father Colin's business of mail-runner, with this difference, that the son carried letters for another King, even Christ, and ran upon a longer line than the Banff and Huntly road, often did he remember how "his poor dear mother used to sit till midnight mending and making their clothes, and yet the beggar was never sent empty from the door." Sometimes the brave little heart gave way, and the child covering his face with the bedclothes would sob, and long for the time when he should be able to aid his mother in the struggles of life. One day coming into possession of a small piece of money, earned by running a message for a neighbour, he took his stand at the window of a little shop, which seemed to embrace in its contents all that was desirable on earth, and there meditated a purchase. The ginger-bread men riding on ginger-bread horses did not much tempt him; nor was he overcome by the little shining clasp-knife, so dear to the heart of boys. Remembering his mother, he invested his money in tea. Hastening home, he secretly deposited his purchase in the cupboard, and watched till he obtained a full reward in the glad surprise of his parent on finding her empty store thus unexpectedly and mysteriously replenished.

The lad was sent early to school, where he made rapid progress, his love of books being fostered by frequent contact with the teacher, who lodged in

the house of the Mathesons. In those days there were two schools in Huntly, the parish school and an adventure school, between which there was a perpetual feud. Almost daily the boys met in battle, and young Matheson, whose martial spirit was thus early stirred, took an eager part in the fray. The school of that time wore an air of awful sternness and solemnity. The thong was real master. The impression made by the opening prayer was too often sadly undone by impression of the *leather*, as it fell with unmitigated severity on the tortured fingers of some little rebel. Strange scenes, the result probably of that undue severity of government, were sometimes witnessed in the school of those days. A stream of water having been turned one day from a neighbouring lane into the schoolroom, the master proceeded as a matter of course to find out the author of the mischief. Young Matheson was unjustly charged, the real criminal having turned false witness; and loud protestations of innocence notwithstanding, Duncan must be flogged. Here the authority of the master failed. The lad's sense of innocence, stimulated by some other feeling not quite akin to innocence, roused him to self-defence; and amidst the cheers of the whole school the scholar beat the master, and reduced him to the necessity of a truce.

The master, who was an earnest Christian and a preacher of the Gospel, did his duty faithfully and well; and Duncan Matheson never ceased to speak of him with feelings of deepest gratitude and esteem. The pains taken by the teacher to polish that rough but genuine Cairngorm were not thrown away.

In the matter of religion it was not a good time in those northern parts. *Moderatism*, which means a religion without earnestness, a form without life, and a Gospel without grace, cast its deadly shadow over many a parish. Light, indeed, was beginning to dawn, the spirit that moved Chalmers was abroad, and, when rare opportunity afforded, men were listening to the ancient story of the cross as if it were a new thing. As yet, however, it was only dim dawn. Strange doctrines were given forth from the pulpit of many a parish church. One taught the people that if they paid their debts and lived a quiet life they were sure of reaching heaven. His brother in the neighbouring parish declared, on the other hand, that nobody can attain to assurance of salvation until the day of judgment, and that the children of God generally die under a cloud—a doctrine he clenched with the scripture, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." A third publicly stigmatized praying people as hypocrites. A fourth acknowledged his dislike of preaching by calling Sabbath "the hanging day." Another apologized to his audience for having once used "that offensive and unpolite expression *hell*." Several of these pastors were famous for their skill in agriculture; but while they kept a well-stocked farm-yard, their scanty supply of sermons grew more dry and mouldy year by year. The preaching was no more likely to awaken a slumbering congre-

gation, than was the chirping of sparrows in the hedge to arouse the still, sad sleepers in the neighbouring kirkyard. A clear, full statement of “the finished work” of Jesus, as the one only and all-sufficient substitute and sin-bearer, was seldom heard. As for the grace of the Holy Spirit the people were no more taught to expect comfort from His fellowship than from the wind howling among the forest trees. In a certain parish contiguous to the district in which our missionary laboured, the minister was one day catechising the people, and put to a woman, noted for the then rare qualities of earnestness and zeal, the question, “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” To the astonishment of all present she replied, “There are *two* persons in the Godhead, the Father and the Son.” Again the minister put the question, and this time with a caution. The same answer was given. “You see,” said the parson, turning pompously to his elders, and glancing round upon the people, “you see what comes of high-flown zeal and hypocritical pretence. This woman thinks to teach others, and herself is more ignorant than a child. What gross ignorance! Woman, don’t you know that the correct answer is, ‘There are *three* persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,’ etc. “Sir,” replied the woman, “I ken verra weel that the catechism says sae. But whether am I to believe, the catechism or yersel’? We hear you name the Father, an’ sometimes, but nae aften ye mak mention o’ the Son; but wha ever heerd you speak about the Holy Ghost? ’Deed, sir, ye never sae muckle as tauld us whether there be ony Holy Ghost, let alane oor need o’ his grace.” The minister stood rebuked; and the people went away home to discuss and think.

The Lord’s flock was scattered on the dark mountains. Some were wandering in a wilderness of perplexity; some were sticking fast in the quagmire of earthliness; some were ready to perish in deep pits of deadly error; and sad were the bleatings of the sheep and the lambs as they pined away in want. Meanwhile the description of unfaithful shepherds given by the prophet Isaiah was realized to the letter. “His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isaiah lvi. 10-12).

But amidst the Egyptian darkness there was a people who had light in their dwellings. These were chiefly Seceders and Independents. Amongst the godly Dissenters there arose at this time a notable preacher, Mr. George Cowie, grand-uncle of Duncan Matheson. He was a man of rare humour, great force of character, and unbounded zeal; qualities in which his relative, the subject of this memoir, strikingly resembled him. Cowie was both pastor

and evangelist. When he began his work in Huntly, where he was ordained as pastor of the Secession Church, he received a baptism of reproach and persecution. The haters of evangelical truth mobbed and pelted him; but he took all meekly, and though well-nigh blinded by showers of dirt and rotten eggs, he turned to his little band of followers and bravely said, "Courage, friends, courage! Pray on; the devil is losing ground."

Many who thirsted for the Gospel came from distant parishes to hear this bold witness for the truth. On Sabbath morning you could see them gather on their way to Huntly; one from yonder turf cot in the midst of a wilderness of peat moss, where the only sign of life is the smoke curling to the sky; another from a little farm recently reclaimed from a marshy waste which anywhere out of Scotland would be regarded as an eternal morass; and a third from down a lonely glen where silence is seldom broken save by the cry of the wild bird. Thus they gather from their native mists in search of light—broad-shouldered men with blue bonnet and plaid, thoughtful matrons with Bible and Psalm book wrapt in clean white handkerchief, and neatly-dressed maidens, light-stepping but modest; and as they journey together they talk of the things that concern the King. Reaching a little well at the wayside they sit down and refresh themselves. They need this rest, for they have come a long journey, some five miles, some ten, and some even fifteen. A drink from the well is followed by a draught of the pure water of life. With the blue heavens for a canopy, the green earth for a carpet, and the little birds for a choir, they worship God in that great temple of nature in which the religion of Scotland has oftentimes been baptized with the blood of her children. They sing the twenty-third Psalm. In grave, sweet melody their hearts go up to heaven in mingled exercise of faith, hope, and charity, as they repeat the most familiar of Scottish household words:

"The Lord's my shepherd;  
I'll not want:  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green; He leadeth me  
The quiet waters by."

To some of those God-fearers the song is a matter of faith rather than of feeling. To others it is a spring of hope and expectation, whilst in some hearts it stirs joy and love.- There are those too who as yet knowing not conscious faith, or hope, or love, or joy, dimly discern the beauty of this holy, blessed, childlike worship, and secretly desire, almost without perceiving in themselves the desire, to know the happiness of that people whose God is the Lord.

When the Psalm is sung all heads are bent and a prayer follows—such a prayer as we have heard among the heather on a hill-side: "O God, oor souls

are jist as dry as the heather: oor herts are as hard as the granite stane: but Thou that gi'est the draps o' dew to the heather, gie us the drappins o' thy grace this day, and let thy ain love licht upon oor hard herts like the birdie sittin' singin' on the rock yonner; an' fill the souls o' thy fowk this day wi' peace and joy till they're rinnin' o'er like the waterspout on the brae. Lord, it'll be nae loss to you, an' it'll be a grand bargain for us, an' we'll mind ye on't tae a' eternity. Amen."

The Haldanes were at this time engaged in their noble evangelistic labours. Mr. Cowie permitted James Haldane to occupy his pulpit, whilst himself remained at the door to listen. At the close of the service the minister, convinced that God was with the lay-preacher, rushed into the church and invited the people to return in the evening and again hear the stranger. For this encouragement given to an evangelist manifestly heaven-sent, Cowie was thrust out of the Secession. But he was not the man to be silenced. His faith and zeal rose to the occasion: he went on preaching and labouring for souls as he had never done before, and the result was the formation of an Independent Church. The light spread. The torch was rudely shaken, but the flame rose upon the night, and many afar off wondered and came to see. In barns and out-of-the-way places meetings were held; and often in the open air the manly voice of George Cowie was heard calling sinners to the Saviour in terms he loved to repeat—"There is life for a look! there is life for a look!"

This faithful servant of God was consumed with zeal. He was sometimes so overpowered with a sense of the value of souls that he needed to be supported by the elders as he went from the vestry to the pulpit. Blessed, surely, are such ministers, and highly favoured the people who enjoy their ministry! Speaking of preaching, Mr. Cowie used to say, "Go direct to conscience, and in every sermon take your hearers to the judgment-seat." One day a preacher, who occupied his place, spoke as if the Holy Spirit was not needed by either saint or sinner. At the close of the service, Cowie stood up on the pulpit steps, and solemnly said, "Sirs, haud in wi' your auld freen, the Holy Ghost, for if ye ance grieve Him awa, ye'll nae get Him back sae easy."

Here Mr. Rowland Hill used to preach with all his wonted dash and power. At a diet of catechising, a method of teaching to which some of the most valuable and characteristic elements of the old Scottish religion were due, the English evangelist was present and put a few simple questions. The answers were promptly and correctly given with the superadded request of an old man, "Gang deeper, sir, gang deeper." Mr. Hill having expressed his satisfaction with the results of the examination, the aged inquirer asked and obtained permission to put a question. "Sir," said he to Mr. Hill, "can ye reconcile the universal call o' the Gospel wi' the doctrine o' a particler elect?" In reply Mr. Hill frankly admitted that while he held both the doctrine of

election and the universal call, he was unable to solve the theological problem proposed by the greyheaded inquirer.

Mr. Cowie exhibited fine tact in dealing with men. "One of his attached hearers was the wife of a wealthy farmer, who, after weeping and praying in vain for her ungodly husband, brought her grief before her pastor, whose preaching she could by no persuasion induce him to hear. After listening to the case, which seemed quite inaccessible, he inquired, 'Is there any thing your good man has a liking to?' 'He heeds for nothing in this world,' was the reply, 'forbye his beasts and his siller, an' it be na his fiddle.' The hint was enough: the minister soon found his way to the farm-house, where after a dry reception, and kindly inquiries about cattle and corn, he awoke the farmer's feelings on the subject of his favourite pastime. The fiddle was produced, and the man of earth was astonished and charmed with the sweet music it gave forth in the hands of the feared and hated man of God. The minister next induced him to promise to return his call, by the offered treat of a finer instrument in his own house, where he was delighted with the swelling tones of a large violin, and needed then but slight persuasion from his wife to accompany her and hear his friend preach. The word took effect in conviction and salvation; and the grovelling earth-worm was transformed into a freehearted son of God, full of the lively hope of the great inheritance above."<sup>1</sup>

This good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ, loved and honoured over a wide extent of country, died and left behind him the precious legacy of many spiritual children bearing the likeness of his own hearty, thorough, downright Christian character. Thousands followed his body to the grave, and on his tombstone were inscribed the words of the prophet Daniel, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." In after years his grand-nephew, Duncan Matheson, when newly ushered into the marvellous light of the Gospel, used to kneel beside the grave in the silence and solitude of night, and cry mightily to heaven, praying that the mantle of his venerated relative might fall upon him, and that the words of the prophet might be illustrated in him also. That prayer was abundantly answered.

We are strangely linked to the past; its traditions, especially such as come to us through the channel of flesh and blood, go far to make us what we are. Though the Matheson family were connected with the Established Church, they had strong leanings to the godly Dissenters; and in his early life Duncan drank in the story and teaching of his uncle from his mother's lips. The banner which dropped from the hands of George Cowie was taken up and nobly sustained by Mr. Hill, the pastor of the Independent Church, and Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Life and Letters of Elizabeth, last Duchess of Gordon. By the Rev. A. Moody Stuart.

Millar, the minister of the Secession, faithful servants of Jesus Christ, whose indefatigable labours prepared the ground for the wider sowing and richer harvest of our time. One day the worthy pastor of the Independent Church laid his hand upon the head of the boisterously frank and manly boy as he romped on the street, and bestowed upon him a prayerful blessing. Did the man of God see in young Matheson a second George Cowie, and even then separate the lad unto the Gospel of Christ by the laying on of believing hands? There are foretokens of a man's future that find no place in our philosophy. At any rate the susceptible heart of the boy was thus impressed, and he used to follow the godly minister upon the street with a curious and wondering reverence. Throughout life he never forgot the gentle hand laid upon his head—the blessing and the prayer.

From infancy up through boyhood the good angel of conviction never ceased to follow Duncan Matheson. Sometimes there is a lull of unholy peace; then comes a disturbed period when the gracious Spirit strives with the rebel heart. Now he seems near the kingdom of God; suddenly a back-wave of temptation carries him anew into the deep. Frequently he is all but overcome by drawings of invisible love; but as yet young flesh and blood prove too strong for these gentle touches of grace. One evening he is passing along the street and hears the sound of praise issuing from a cottage where a prayer-meeting is in progress. A good impulse carries him to the window. Peering in at a chink, he sees the faces of the company brightened up by no ordinary radiance, and as he listens he hears their glad voices singing,

“O greatly bless'd the people are  
The joyful sound that know;  
In brightness of thy face, O Lord,  
They ever on shall go.”

His heart is touched; he wishes he were amongst them to share their joy; but like one who would purchase a pearl were it not for the greatness of the price, he goes away with nothing but vague longings and hesitating resolves. These feelings do not last long; they are but the morning cloud and early dew. Next day he is a very ringleader in persecuting the children of the saints, whom he mocks and calls by opprobrious names.

A special interest was taken in young Matheson's spiritual welfare by James Maitland, an aged Christian and a convert of Mr. Cowie's. This old disciple was always ready in his own quaint and homely way to testify to the truth and grace of God. When a shallow theorist one day attempted to make the way into the kingdom of heaven easy to the flesh, James said, “I ken verra weel that a human faith can receive a human testimony; but, man, dinna ye ken it needs a divine faith to receive a divine testimony.” To another who paid him a compliment for his Christian worth, he replied, “I some-

times wonder if I'm a Christian at a'; for ye ken we ocht to lay doon our lives for the brithren, but I can hardly bring mysel' to like the cross-grained anes." He kept an eye on the young people of the place, and his wise, loving counsels were not in vain. To a lad about to leave the town he said, "Young man, you are like a ship going to sea without compass or helm." These words led to his conversion. Maitland's heart was much drawn to Duncan Matheson, in whom he could discern not a little of the natural character of his minister and spiritual father. Duncan strove hard to keep out of the old man's way, but being sent on an errand one day to Maitland's house he was fairly caught. James shut the door on himself and the boy, and began to tell him the story of Mr. Cowie's conversion. This done he brought the conversation to a practical bearing by asking the lad about his soul's case. The answer was unsatisfactory.

Then followed homely, tender words about "God's wonderfu' love to sinners," and "the warm hert o' Jesus yimin' to save," and "the kind Spirit strivin' wi' a' his mielit," with solemn remonstrance as well as touching appeal, not without effect, since conscience was all on James's side. Duncan went away very unhappy. The hour of decision had not yet arrived; but one gun on the rampart of unbelief had been spiked. The impression made by Maitland's faithful words and tender dealings was never wholly lost.

Speaking of this period he says, "My conscience often pricked me, and if the thunder rolled I went to prayer. I knew only the Lord's prayer, and used it as an incantation to ward off evil. If I saw a funeral I trembled, and thoughts of judgment pressed hard upon me." One evening his mother, who instead of always speaking directly to her children about salvation, wisely followed the method of reading aloud from some interesting book, had fallen upon a well-known illustration of the endlessness of eternity. Suppose a little bird comes once in a thousand years and carries away a particle of dust from yon lofty mountain, how vast a number of years must elapse ere the huge mass has been entirely removed! And yet when those countless myriads of years have come and gone, eternity will be no nearer an end than it was at first. What, then, will be the misery of the lost in the place where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched? Such was the impression made upon the boy's mind that he could not sleep, and spent a great part of the night in weeping. The germ of truth thus lodged by a mother's hand in the heart of her son was not lost. It did not indeed result in his immediate conversion, but it took hold of his spirit, and by the blessing of God became a great power in his soul; for throughout his entire Christian course one thought was never absent from his view, one motive never ceased to work mightily in his heart, one argument never failed to drop from his lips with amazing power on the ears of thousands, and that was *the endlessness of eternity*. Little did that mother dream of the great work she was doing as she

read the simple illustration in the hearing of her boy. Little did she imagine the vast harvest to be reaped from that seedling, and the mighty forces that were being set in motion by so gentle a touch.

The dread of future punishment held him in check, even in his most lawless days. "The eternity of it," he says, "more than any thing else, awed me, and if I could have persuaded myself that after thousands of years the torments of hell should cease, I would have given full swing to my evil heart, and more madly than I was even then doing would have rushed on to eternal death."

The death of his sister Ann, "a sweet, holy child, who talked of Jesus with her latest breath," drew the furrows of conviction fresh and deep in his already well-ploughed heart; and as he stood by the grave, "the dull, muffled sound of the clods dropping upon the coffin-lid seemed to ring into his conscience this one word, Eternity."

Sickness followed: it was another gentle messenger from Him whose name is Love. Many thorns now vexed his pillow; it was sovereign grace arousing him from his dangerous sleep. A host of evils seemed to surround him; it was a host of angels sent to shut him in and chase the wanderer home. As yet he saw not the Saviour; he saw only the clouds that are about his throne. The darkness which he imagined revealed the Avenger concealed his Redeemer, and the sounds that seemed to his awakened conscience to be the roll of the chariot wheels of death, were but the echoes of approaching salvation. Sometimes he would bury his fears in the grave of good resolution, and write upon the tombstone, "By and by;" but from the dead his convictions would arise with ghastly horror, and then his wretchedness, overflowing its banks, would pour itself out in wrathful torrents, making the whole house unhappy and even afraid. They knew not the terrible conflict that raged in his breast; they saw not the misery of the maddened spirit wrestling with the Almighty, and heard not the despairing cry, "Would God I had never been born?"

Before his mind's eye one great truth now began to appear in hazy outline. The absolute necessity of being born again was beginning to take hold of his thoughts. It was a point gained—one step towards the light. Not seldom did he pray God to convert him, though, like Augustine, he was fain to add "not yet." Some friends perceiving his talents advised him to enter the University, and offered him a bursary on condition of his studying for the ministry—a course which his parents earnestly desired him to follow; but he refused, saying with characteristic frankness, "A minister ought to be a converted and a holy man. I am not that. I cannot do it." When he and two companions were urged to become members of the church, straightforward as usual, he replied, "I am not converted, and you know it. G\_\_\_\_\_ is not converted, nor is D\_\_\_\_\_. We are on the brink, and you would push us over.

You would have us go to the Lord's table in our sins, and then on Sabbath evening you would pray for the unworthy communicants." Turning to his companions he said, "Come away;" and as he went out of the minister's presence he said to himself, "The whole thing is a sham. I may as well be an infidel." In all this there may have been a lack of courtesy, and a little pride; but he had noticed the unfaithfulness of certain pastors in the admission of young communicants, and the sad effect on the communicants themselves, who made a pillow of the Lord's table for their deadly slumbers, and his honest spirit rebelled against what he believed to be an unholy sham.

The disruption of the Church of Scotland with its stirring events drew near. Patronage was doing its evil works. The conflict between the Church and the civil power was becoming more fierce and uncompromising. A minister was thrust into the parish of Marnoch against the will of the people. Duncan Matheson was present at the forced settlement, and, young though he was, warmly sympathized with the Christian flock, whose rights were thus trampled under foot. The scene made a deep impression on his heart. But not until he submitted himself to the Lord Jesus did he rightly understand the great question of the time—the independence of the Church, and the Crown rights of the Saviour as her sole King and Head. At this time able and faithful ministers of the Gospel were sent down to Strathbogie, the scene of conflict. The word was with great power. On one occasion Mr. Moody Stuart preached a sermon on the strait gate, which Duncan Matheson says was blessed to many souls. On another occasion the Lord's Supper was dispensed by Mr. Cumming, of Dunbarney, and Mr. M'Cheyne, Dundee. The people met in the open air and sat upon the grass listening to the word. In the afternoon the sky darkened, and the thunder pealing overhead added an awful solemnity to the service. In the evening Robert M'Cheyne preached with "Eternity stamped upon his brow." "I think I can yet see his seraphic countenance," says Matheson, "and hear his sweet and tender voice. I was spell-bound, and could not keep my eyes off him for a moment. He announced his text—Paul's thorn in the flesh. What a sermon! I trembled, and never felt God so near. His appeals went to my heart, and as he spoke of the last great day in the darkening twilight, for once I began to pray. At the close he invited all those who were anxious to retire to the chapel. Here began a tremendous struggle in my heart, a struggle I can recall as if it had been but yesterday. I looked to see if my special friend D. McP\_\_\_\_\_ was going in, but I could see him nowhere. He afterwards told me he was looking for me with a like desire. Were he to go in, I would. Were he to be a Christian, I would. Slowly I went through the darkness, and reached the chapel, with the words, 'Quench not the Spirit,' ringing in my ears. I looked in at the window and saw many there I knew. I hesitated: I approached the door and looked in. Hastily I turned back. The die was cast. The tempter

whispered, 'Another time.' Alas! alas!

'I chose the world and an endless shroud.'

Oh the long-suffering of God! Then and there how justly might God have said, 'Let him alone.' I deserved it. I was near the kingdom: I stood trembling on the threshold: I did not enter in. My case should lead no one to presume, not one in thousands, perhaps, in such a state as mine was—trifling with God—is ever saved. It is a solemn thing to say *tomorrow* when God says *today*; for man's tomorrow and God's today never meet. The word that comes from the eternal throne is *now*, and it is a man's own choice that fixes his doom."

After this grieving of the Holy Ghost, Duncan Matheson tried hard "to forget all about eternity, and took to novel-reading." For a season he seemed to be too successful: he was intoxicated with the vanities of fiction, and plunged into all but utter oblivion of God. It was probably owing to this sad experience that he never ceased to deplore the injurious effect of novel-reading on the minds and hearts of the young, and to denounce in no measured terms the conduct of Christians and ministers who give too great encouragement to indulgence in the sensational literature of our day. He once found a trashy work of fiction on the pillow of a dying person. No marvel, then, if he spoke strongly of the evil. From Dreamland into Eternity—what a transition!