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 VI.

*DAYS OF REVIVAL.*

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IS native air speedily restored his health. Not one day was wasted in needless rest. Often at this period did he at public meetings tell his Crimean story amidst torrents of tears; but he always took care, when the fountains of emotion were stirred, to cast the bread of truth upon the waters, in the hope of finding it after many days. Invited by the min­ister of the Free Church at Insch, he occupied the pulpit for the first time. Here he held the first inquirers’ meeting, which was attended by a few, and among the rest an old man who said, “I’ve come that ye may search me weel. Oh, dinna scruple to try me, as it wad be a fearfu’ thing to be deceived for eternity. Noo, sir, begin.” “John,” said the evangelist, “do you love the Lord Jesus? “I dinna doot that,” was the reply, “but I wad like mair.” The old disciple was still inquiring. Dur­ing his three months’ labour at Insch several persons were awakened. One of these afterwards became an elder in a Free Church, and another, a young woman, became the wife of a missionary, and was instrumental in winning souls.

In October, 1857, he went to labour as an evange­list in Whitehaven, at the request of a minister of the Church of England, who was desirous of pro­moting the spiritual welfare of his native place. He found the soil of Cumberland stiff; but his labours were not wholly in vain. It was a sowing-time rather than a harvest. Then he began to preach every day, a practice he followed throughout the rest of his active ministry. “To this place,” he says in a letter, “I have almost done my duty. Surely, if I go home I shall get a little rest. *Rest* did I say? Nay, truly, whilst health is granted. The days pass swiftly. Soon all will be gone. Since I came here I have not got half-an-hour to take my dinner at a time, and the door is widening on every hand.”

Here he resorted again to the press. When lying at the point of death in the East, he had prayed that ten years might be added to his life, and vowed that if spared he would publish a testimony for Christ. The prayer was answered, and the vow duly per­formed. The testimony for Jesus took the form of a little monthly periodical, which he entitled, “The Herald of Mercy.” After much prayer he issued the first number at the close of 1857. “I had no money to advertise it with,” he tells, “but I trusted in God, and cried to Him to spread and bless it for his own glory.” Under his editorship it held on its way till it reached a circulation of 32,000 a month. It was declared by many to have been the herald of mercy to their souls. Its aim was the awakening and con­version of sinners. It was not designed or specially adapted for the edification of saints, excepting so far as it kept before the eye of believers the worth of souls and the realities of the eternal world. Never did the trumpet give a more certain sound than in the mouth of “The Herald of Mercy.” It recognized nothing on earth but *souls:* souls in sin, and souls in Christ: souls going to heaven, and souls going to hell. Every article, paragraph, and sentence, orig­inal or selected, bore directly and plainly on the great truths—ruin, regeneration, and redemption. The little messenger was owned of God, as a few facts will show.

A stranger came to Mr. Matheson one day in Crieff, and asked him if he remembered a “Herald of-Mer­cy “with an article headed, “Quench not the Spirit” “That,” said he, “was the means of my conversion.”

An English lady, resident in Constantinople, for whose spiritual welfare much had been done in vain, received from a friend a copy of the “Herald.” The reading of it resulted in her conversion.

A tradesman in Berwickshire one day finding a fragment of paper on the floor, picked it up, and as a matter of curiosity, began to read. It proved to be part of the “Herald of Mercy,” being a brief article, headed, “Are you converted?” It was an arrow from the King’s own bow. Conversion followed.

Two young men stood side by side at an open-air meeting. One of them held in his hand a copy of “Special Herald,” with hymns; but while they sang the eye of his companion wandered from the verses to a little paragraph put in to fill a vacant corner. It was enough: both eye and heart were fixed. The little article spoke with divine power, and brought him to Jesus’ feet. The young man is now a min­ister of the Gospel.

A herd-boy was sitting at the wayside, when someone passing put a “Herald of Mercy” into his hand. As he tended the cattle he read, was awakened, and brought to Christ. He is now known as a devoted follower of Christ.

Invited by Lady Pirrie, he went to Malvern in the autumn of 1858, and laboured there for a short time. Here on the hill-side he held his first open-air meeting, and felt he received a special call to this kind of work in the blessing that attended the service. Henceforth he gave himself to preaching in the open air. By day, by night, beneath the summer sun, out in the drenching rain or piercing cold of winter, in the remote glen amidst the bleat­ing of the sheep, at the sea-side, where the singing of David’s psalms mingles with the still more an­cient harmonies of the great ocean, on the crowded street, in the noisy fair, beneath the shadow of the scaffold, in the face of the raging mob—everywhere, in short, as far as in him lay, he strove to preach Christ to perishing men. In this way his voice reached many who otherwise would never have heard the glad tidings of salvation.

From Malvern he retraced his steps to Cumber­land, and for a while laboured at Workington. Here by invitation of the people he occupied the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church, and combined the offices of pastor and evangelist. His preaching excited no ordinary interest. Crowds flocked to hear him, and not a few were impressed.

On February 2d, 1859, he was married at Weston-super-Mare to Miss Mary Milne, a Christian lady whom he ever regarded as an invaluable gift be­stowed upon him in answer to prayer. Not one day was withdrawn from labour. Exuberantly social and tenderly affectionate though he was, the winning of souls was to him infinitely more than the most endearing relationship or the most hallowed earthly joy. “We’ll get settled up yonder in the Father’s house,” he said; “meanwhile let us work and win. souls.”

In the spring of 1859 Mr. Matheson returned to Scotland, and took up his residence in the city of Aberdeen. The great religious awakening of that period was just beginning. Tidings of the work of grace in America and Ireland stirred the hearts of Christians, and many were in expectation of a similar blessing. The spirit of grace and supplication was poured down, and many a blessed scene was now witnessed. The winter was indeed past, and the time of the singing of birds come. The beginning and progress of the work were everywhere char­acterized by a real faith in the efficacy of prayer, and the power that attended the testimony of Chris­tians to Christ. In answer to prayer the treasured petitions of years seemed to be granted in one day. The simplest utterances of even babes in Christ were instrumental in converting sinners. In fact, the tes­tifying of believers and its effect was a marked feat­ure of the work. In *teaching*, the truth is set forth simply on its own merits. In *preaching*, there is an authoritative, herald-like proclamation of the Gospel in the King’s name. In *testifying*, the speaker bears witness to matters of fact of which he is personally cognizant. The best preacher, doubtless, is teacher, herald, and witness, all in one. But testifying has its place and power. Many were saying, “Christ is dead: Christianity is dead,” when suddenly thou­sands arose, and with one voice declared, “Christ is not dead. He lives, and the proof is this, He has saved us: He has raised to a new life us who were dead in trespasses and sins.” “The Lord gave the word, and great was the company of those that published it.”

It is worthy of remark that the work began, at least in its more striking manifestations, in the fish­ing village of Ferryden, and quickly extended to the numerous little towns that dot the north-eastern coast. It reminded many of the beginning of the Lord’s ministry in the fishing villages of Galilee; and the recent gracious visit of the Lord Jesus to our own Galilean regions seemed to some like the return of an old love.

In Aberdeen Mr. Matheson occupied the pulpit of Blackfriars Street Independent Chapel. Joining his friends, Mr. Radcliffe and Mr. Campbell (minis­ter of Free North Church), he threw himself heart­ily into the work. Not satisfied with ordinary effort, they set themselves to carry the war into the very camp of the enemy by open-air services in the streets and elsewhere. In writing to a friend, he says:

“I have only time for a few words, and my ob­ject in writing is specially to ask your prayers that at this time the Lord may greatly bless me in the ingathering of souls. Yesterday was one of the most remarkable days I have spent in my life. Mr. F\_\_\_\_ the godly man who brought me to Aberdeen, was well yesterday morning. He went at two o’clock to the meeting in the County Buildings; read 16th of John, sang a psalm, engaged in prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit, sat down, cast his eyes to heaven, gave a deep sigh, and in a moment his spirit was with Jesus whom he loved. At eight o’clock Mr. Campbell and I preached to thousands in the open air. What a night We had over and over again to preach. The crowds had to be divided, for they were too large. We could not till nearly eleven o’clock get away from the awakened. Mr. Radcliffe was unable to speak. Pray, pray for us. The Lord is doing great things. I believe almost every time one speaks souls are brought to Christ. Pray for me —for humility. The Lord bless you. I am weary.

“ Yours in Him,

“DUNCAN MATHESON.”

Speaking of the work of grace in Aberdeen, in a letter of date 17th August, 1859, he says:

“After a residence of nearly five months in this city, and having come in contact with the work in all its phases, I have no hesitation in saying that a great and glorious work of grace has been felt here, and that it is still going on. It is impossible to esti­mate its extent, or gather up one half of the results. More, far more, has been done than is apparent; and yet it is a fact that numbers have been more or less influenced by the truth, and that many, very many, manifestly have been brought to Christ. There can be no doubt of this, and as yet I have not met one case of any truly awakened returning to the world. The Lord has given a visible stamp to not a few, and the zeal, love, affection, prayerfulness, and humility of many of the young converts is remarkable. I never during my life saw more deep concern for souls than I have seen here, and the close clinging to each other, though in different churches, is refreshing—most refreshing. Groups of the young are to be found here and there throughout the whole city meeting for prayer; and one thing has struck me almost more than anything—the holy boldness in confessing Christ, and acknowledging what He has done for their souls. Another striking thing is this, that few have found Christ themselves, but they have been instrumental in the awakening of others. Many instances of this have come under my notice. A leading feature in the prayers of the young converts is the prayer offered up for the Christian ministry. One would often think they were burdened with the care of the ministry; and a high, deep respect for the ministers of the Gospel, in so far as they are owned of God and devoted to His work, is manifest. We have had the revival, and the fruits are apparent to all who have min­gled in the work. Often has it pained us, many going away and saying, ‘I saw none.’ Nay, and how could they, if they did not go where it was, and if they did not ask those who do know it?

“The grace of God has been much displayed in not a few instances that have come under our notice, of parties coming to spend a Sabbath in the city, going away to their homes deeply awakened, or re­joicing in Jesus, and becoming centres of blessing where they lived. I have passed through many parishes in the country, and found here and there anxious souls; and one thing is undeniable, that never was there a time when so many were thirst­ing for the Word, and that where ministers have taken advantage of this, and entered with intensity into this new state of things, there a blessing has descended. At Chapel of Garioch, Banchory, etc., the Lord has been working, but with much power at Chapel of Garioch; and I believe that there is not a parish around it but has its awakened ones. The truth that above all others seems to be owned is—‘You are lost. A Saviour has been provided. It is your duty to accept Him *now.*’ Ruin by the fall, righteousness by Christ, and regeneration only by the Holy Ghost, are the leading truths of every ad­dress. They are uttered in much simplicity, from loving hearts (I speak of Mr. Radcliffe and the min­isters well known engaged in the work), and in much dependence on the Holy Ghost, and the bless­ing does descend. We can convince no one if they will not believe. Hearts leap for joy, and songs of holy triumph are sung. The Spirit is breathing; the Holy Ghost is working; the gale is blowing; the tide has risen and is still rising. Blessed they that take advantage of it, and girding themselves for the battles of the Lord, go forth to preach Christ,

“As dying men unto dying men.’

 But how sad to awake and find the opportunity gone, and hear, in the looks of hardened sinners, powerless sermons, and unheeded warnings, the voice, deep and solemn—‘*Thou hadst a day.*’God bless you evermore.”

From Aberdeen he went frequently to the country, and found many of the rural parishes awakening as out of a deep sleep. Let us follow him to two or three places of interest. An awakening took place in the Free Church of Garioch in August, 1859. Mr. Matheson was present when the work began. “The prominent characteristic which ever attracted most our love for Mr. Matheson,” writes Mrs. Bain, wife of the esteemed minister, “was his devoted and con­tinual watching and working for the salvation of souls. I noticed this at my first meeting with him, which occurred in a stage-coach about 1848, on which occasion I was greatly refreshed while listen­ing to a conversation in which I found my two fellow-travellers engaged when I entered the coach. One, an elderly man, was making objections to the doctrine of sovereign grace. The other, a young man, although evidently suffering under severe toothache, was using the opportunity to plead for truth wisely and lovingly. I felt so interested as to be constrained to inquire on reaching our journey’s end after his name, and found it was Duncan Mathe­son, then said to be a stone-cutter, but evidently be­ing prepared to use skilfully the hammer of the Word of God in polishing living stones for the great temple. Some years afterwards, being employed in missionary work in and around Huntly, he was asked to address a meeting here, which, I think, was almost the first of his evangelistic labours beyond his native district. From that occasion onward to his last visit, after his illness was far advanced, many were his kind and stirring visits to us and among us, and many have cause to bless God for them.

“Mr. Matheson was engaged to preach here on the evening of August 4th, 1859, Mr. Bain being then in Ireland, drawn over by the great revival there. Some days before I received an intimation from Mr. Radcliffe of his willingness to come and ad­dress our people, and spend some time here, which being accepted, Mr. Matheson’s previous engage­ment proved a very gracious arrangement in prov­idence for leading him to be present, and giving his most valuable assistance on that remarkable night of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the people gathered from the surrounding district, his previous knowledge of not a few of them giving him an ad­vantage in dealing with the many souls awakened on that memorable occasion.

“After the market-preaching began, Mr. Matheson came to us for several years on the Sabbath nearest the Whitsunday and Martinmas terms. These visits were looked forward to with desire, and much prized by our people. On one of these Sabbaths the power of God was manifest upon the souls of many, espe­cially in the afternoon. Mr. Bain being absent, I was called out of church after the close of the first service, and while a prolonged meeting was being held on account of the agitated state of some young persons. I found at the church door a lad who had long been in my Sabbath Bible-class, and who up to the morning of that day had been, as far as I could see, entirely hard and careless, answering questions with perfect ease and indifference, so that I found it necessary, in order to keep him in his own place, to frame questions of some difficulty for him. My amazement was great to see his usually hard face pale, his whole frame trembling. And when I asked the cause, he could only gasp, ‘My sins! my sins!’ I brought him and his sister, also awakened, to the Manse, and advised them, after other efforts to help them, to cry to God. ‘I cannot pray,’ he said, in great distress. I left them a little, and then returned, when I found him wrestling in an agoniz­ing way to find the words which were gradually coming out of his lips. Mr. Matheson took much interest in this case, which, after some time of deep distress, appeared to issue in a new birth and con­sistent profession. The young man having left this neighbourhood, I have not seen him for several years.

“Mr. Matheson’s influence over the people here was great, as may be judged from the fact that, after the revival in 1859-60, he one day threw out while preaching a suggestion that the young men of our congregation should agree to support a native Chi­nese evangelist under Mr. Wm. Burns. A few took up the idea, and ever since the yearly salary has been gathered, although he who suggested and some who began the work now rest from their labours.

“Mr. Matheson’s preaching was wonderfully at­tractive in most places to some whose position and previous training would not have led one to expect a Scottish lay-evangelist to be listened to with plea­sure. But I believe the secret of his power lay in his deep heart-yearning over souls, and dealing with God in secret for them in connection with the sanc­tified wisdom and tact with which the Master gifted him as a fisher of men.

“He was engaged in this work in season and out of season, in secret and in public. On one occasion, while walking alone in this neighbourhood, a lady passed on horseback, whose general bearing and talents had led him to feel interested in her while yet a stranger to saving grace. He retired into a wood, then and there knelt down, and cried to God for her conversion; and I doubt not this was one of the links in the appointed chain of circumstances by which ere long she was drawn by the cords of divine love to God, and became for a few years, till called to the home above, a bright Christian.”

Towards the close of 1859 he began to extend his evangelistic itinerancy to Banffshire, preaching for the most part in the towns and villages along the coast. His labours were specially blessed in the burgh and seaport of Cullen. This little town is situated on the brow of a hill looking full in the face the blue waters of the Northern Sea, where it begins to narrow into the beautiful Frith of Moray, whose ample tide is bounded on the southern shore by wild, picturesque, and caverned rocks; whilst the lofty mountains of Sutherland and Caithness rise far upon the deep, like giant warders of the northern coast. Beneath the burgh proper lies the fishing village in a tumult of houses upon the beach, where the storm often breaks with Arctic fury, casting clouds of spray high into the air, and sometimes in­vading the cottages that line the shore.

Early in 1860 the whole place was moved as by an earthquake. Fear took hold on the sinners in Zion; trembling seized the hypocrites. Careless ones, whose shadow had not darkened the door of God’s house for many years, found their way to church or chapel; and even worldly men talked to one another about the great question upon the streets. At first the awful shadow of an angry God coming to judgment fell on many, and it seemed as if there was one dead in every house. Awakening was followed by conversion. The thun­der of Sinai gave way to the peaceful sunshine of Calvary. Christians who had never known the liberty of the Gospel were suddenly delivered from the spirit of bondage, and ushered into the joyful assurance of acceptance in the Beloved.

Our evangelist visited Cullen just as the work of grace was becoming manifest, and preached fre­quently in the Free and Independent churches, receiving from the pastors a cordial welcome. On one memorable night he preached to a crowded congre­gation in the Free Church. The subject of his dis­course was “The Barren Fig-tree.” From the be­ginning of the service a deep solemnity rested on the people, and the minds of many were in a state of strange expectancy. Unveiling the truth, the preacher describes a community favoured with the light and privileges of the Gospel. Privilege after privilege is enjoyed. Sabbath follows Sabbath in peaceful succession. Opportunity after opportunity occurs, and sermon on sermon. Mercy presses on the heels of mercy, like the bright days of summer chasing time to its wintry close. The sharp dispen­sations of the providential pruning-knife come again and again. But all is in vain. The sunshine and the rain have been to no purpose; the digging and the dunging have been in vain. The Father’s love has been to them as nought. The blood of the Son has been despised. The grace of the Spirit has brought forth no fruit in them. Forbearance and intercession have yielded no result but failure. After the resources of the Godhead in the Gospel of Christ, what then? The people know that He is drawing their portrait with unmistakable resemblance. Feel­ing they are found out among the trees of the gar­den, they tremble and listen with breathless atten­tion. The sonorous voice of the preacher grows thrillingly solemn and tender as he proceeds, till at length he pours out his last warning in a torrent of compassionate feeling. His eye glances with an awful light, as if he is looking into eternity, while he lifts his hands and pronounces the sentence with a mighty and judgment-like voice, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it any longer the ground?” Never did woodman aim a better stroke. God is in the Word. Old rotten trunks are crashing beneath the blow. One and another are saying with irrepressi­ble alarm, “It is I! it is I! God be merciful to my soul!” The results are with Him who knoweth all things; but there is reason to believe that some of the audience will remember that night and the fell­ing of the barren fig-tree amidst the songs and joys of eternity.

On another memorable occasion he preached in the Independent Chapel. The little meeting-house is crowded to the door. The night is intensely cold and dark. The frost having rendered the ordinary lights unavailable, the darkness is made visible by a single candle which the preacher holds in his hand. His text is “Remember Lot’s wife.” The narrative receives a graphic handling. The clear sky of early morn suddenly darkens, a cloud of appalling black­ness throws the shadow of approaching judgment upon the cities of the plain. Then a gleam of more than lightning vividness kindles all the air, a whirlwind of fire sweeps down upon Sodom and wraps its four corners, its every street and suburb, its every house and chamber, its every man and woman, in the very winding-sheet of hell. Ah! now the inhabitants of the doomed city wake to find that their damnation slumbereth not. But a little band of four escapes. An angelic saviour leads them on. Well may they hasten, for the devouring fire sweeps fast along the plain. One of the four lingers, only a little; but a little is at this awful moment decisive of much. God’s wrath is abroad. Is this a time to trifle? The fiery tempest suddenly closes her round, and there she stands under an eternal arrest, a pillar of salt. Some such picture is before the eye of the people’s imagination as the preacher proceeds to the more important part of his discourse—its application to the consciences of the hearers. God enters by lit­tle, lowly doors into men’s hearts. The Spirit uses little things to make and deepen impressions of the unseen and the eternal. The darkness of the place; the solitary candle throwing a dim, pale light on the preacher’s countenance, and giving it a strange weird look; the deep silence, broken only by a sigh or a sob, and the solemn tones of a voice speaking, as it were, out of the invisible, and warning every trifler with the soul and with God to “remember Lot’s wife,” conspired, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to bring about one of those supreme moments of crisis when souls must and do decide their destiny for eternal weal or eternal woe.

Our evangelist made his mark on the young men of the town. His broad, free, genial manners capti­vated their hearts; his talents, magnanimity, and up­rightness commanded their respect. Many of them were converted at this time; and it was pleasing to see the finest youths of the place sitting in a com­pany round about their father in the faith, and re­ceiving his counsels as from an angel of God. For the young men he had a peculiar love: they were his joy, and as his very life. He cared for their in­terests as a father for his children, and cherished them as a nurse cherishes a babe. He guided them with skill, warning them against the errors of his own early Christian days; and having won their confidence, he strove to lead them to the highest idea of the life of faith. In particular, he ever urged upon them entire consecration. “Be out and out for Christ,” he would say; “nail your colours to the mast; labour for God, and live for eternity.” In this way he succeeded in stamping upon them the im­press of his own decided and energetic character, and through the grace given him inspired them with an intense longing to win souls. One of them is now an ordained missionary in China; another labours in Turkey; a third preaches the Gospel at home; a fourth is preparing to take the field as a medical missionary; and others are occupying their talent in the quiet corners of the vineyard.

An instance of the way in which the fire was then spreading may be here given. James Wilson, a na­tive of Cullen, and an accomplished classical scholar, was at that time master of a school at Aberfeldy, in Perthshire. Hearing of the work of grace in his native town, he was deeply moved. Previous to this he had regarded earnestness in religion as a mere extravagance; but now “the name to live whilst dead” satisfied him no longer. The work of God began in the village, and the minister of the Free Church was frequently assisted by Mr. Mathe­son. The teacher was led to take a decided stand for Christ, and thenceforth all his learning and in­fluence were given to the work of the Lord. His school became a nursery for the church and the di­vinity hall. Remarkable success attended his labours among the youths, some of whom, after a brilliant academic career, have entered on the work of the ministry with much promise of usefulness. The course of the devoted teacher was terminated by an early translation to glory.

Cullen lay much on the heart of the evangelist. For years he continued to visit it, labouring to win its inhabitants to Christ. On his way thither many a weary mile did he trudge, often amidst the rains and snows of winter, receiving no pay and seeking no reward but “souls.” Divining his motives, the shrewd fishermen said, “That man fishes by the cran;” that is to say, he is no mere hireling: he labours not for a comfortable living, but finds his re­ward in the number of souls saved. Often was his stentorian voice heard ringing from the centre of the town to its circumference in the quiet of the even­ing, when the deepening shades added solemnity to the preacher’s word; and strong men were known to tremble at their own fireside as the question fell upon their unwilling ears, “Who shall stand before this holy Lord God?”

In most of the villages that stud the Banffshire coast, a stranger in those days had but to signify his willingness to preach the Gospel, when suddenly, as if by magic, the whole population, men, women, and children, would assemble to hear the Word of God. To see the great crowd kneeling reverently on the grass amidst the deepest silence broken only by a groan, a sob, a loud cry for mercy, to be followed by fond, enthusiastic demonstrations of love and hearty songs of praise, characteristic of these impulsive chil­dren of the sea, was a sight impressive beyond de­scription, and never to be forgotten. From such scenes Duncan Matheson, like one refreshed with the new wine of the kingdom, was wont to come away singing his favourite Psalm—

“When Zion’s bondage God turned back,

Like men that dreamed were we;

Then filled with laughter was our mouth,

Our tongue with melody.”

The landward parishes were not overlooked by the great Redeemer as He marched along the sea­coast in glorious majesty: from His bountiful hand the blessings of His grace were now being scattered far and wide. The reapers on the field, from the master to the gleaner, were known to lay aside at noonday the urgent labours of the harvest to attend to the more pressing business of the soul. Jesus was gathering golden sheaves into his garner. Mathe­son at this period, strong to reap rather than patient to sow, lent his powerful aid in every place. Few in all that region missed hearing the jubilant voice of our sturdy reaper, and seeing the gleam of his sharp sickle among the yellow corn. Prompt in word and deed, skilful above most men to strike the iron while it was hot, brooking no restraints of mere policy or empty form, and impetuous almost beyond measure, he was in his proper character an Arab in the service of the King. Hungering after great re­sults, having capacity for work and fatigue enough for two men, and withal possessing that rare and dangerous power of will by which strong souls can indefinitely postpone the season of rest, the un­wearied spirit keeping the wearied flesh up to its own high mark, our evangelist moved from one place to another with the rapidity of a courier in the crisis of battle. Seizing the opportunities that will not tarry for the timid or the too cautious, he launched on the full tide when others were laying down canons for discussing the conditions of its ebb and flow. The very air seemed full of elements deeply solemn and heart-touching. A divine pres­ence rested everywhere, and men were compelled for a time to breathe the atmosphere of eternity. Doors that might soon close were opening on every side, and the energetic lay-preacher was not slow to enter in. Pushing along the coast as far north as Moray and Nairn, he bent his steps into the interior, and visited Dufftown, Tomintoul, and Braemar. Sweeping southward to the counties of Forfar and Perth, he gradually extended his circuit until it embraced the whole country from John o’ Groat’s to the English border. To follow him into every town and parish is impossible: we can only seize on a few points.

In the gracious visitations of this period Dundee was not passed by. In the many evangelistic ser­vices then held in this town Mr. Matheson lent fre­quent and effective aid. He preached in churches of various denominations, and his voice was often heard in the open air. One winter he remained here three months, every day and night of which was spent in exhausting but fruitful toil. One Sab­bath evening early in 1860, he addressed a crowded congregation in Hilltown Church. An unwonted solemnity, deepening as the service proceeded into a feeling of awe, seemed to rest on the audience. The preacher discoursed from Matthew xxv. 46: “And these shall go away into everlasting punish­ment: but the righteous into life eternal.” In words Most telling and pictures most vivid he described the sinner’s going away—away from the fair scenes of nature, from the warbling of the birds and the mur­mur of the brooks, from the smiling of the summer sun and the rich glow of autumn—away from every lovely sight and every pleasant sound away from friends and home and social joys, of everything dear to the heart of man upon the earth—away from the peaceful Sabbath, with its hallowed services and its heavenly calm, to hear the sound of the Sabbath bell and the song of praise no more forever—away from the affectionate efforts and touching appeals of the faithful preacher, and from the sympathies and prayers of Christian friends—away from the Bible, with its beautiful stories, its comforting promises, and its heavenly truths, like God’s windows, letting down light upon a dark world—away from all the peace and purity and hope of the Gospel—away from God, whose mercy they reject, forever—away from Jesus, whose blood they trample beneath their feet—away from the gracious Spirit to whom they have done so great despite—away from all joy and blessing and good, for evermore. To render the truths more vivid, he described a heart-melting scene he had witnessed in the East in the depart­ure of a weeping crowd of Circassian exiles, whose loud and agonizing wail told the love they bore to their fatherland, from which they were being driven by the scourge of war. As he went on in his own pathetic manner, with a certain grandly plaintive music as of eternity in his voice, to describe the de­parture of the woe-stricken exiles of sin and despair into the blackness of darkness forever, speaking as feelingly as if he saw them disappearing in that dis­mal and unknown night, the heavy sigh, the stifled sob, and the pallor on many a face, revealed the all but uncontrollable emotion of the people. At the close of the service the session and vestry were crowded with the awakened. The place was a Bochim. The first person that obtained deliverance started up, saying, “I have found Him! I have found Him! I never saw the way before!” and be­gan to praise and glorify God. This only pierced the hearts of the others with a keener sorrow. Fearing lest they should be left in their sins, they began to charge themselves with unpardonable hardness of heart, and to prostrate themselves before God in the most affecting manner. To one after another came peace and joy in believing, and quickly, the weep­ing was changed into songs of praise. Such scenes as these were afterwards renewed with blessed fre­quency; and the gracious character of the work came out in holy lives, patient sufferings, and tri­umphant deaths.

In the autumn of the same year open-air meet­ings were held in the Barrack Park in this town. On the second day several of the ministers and others, fearing lest there should be no blessing, re­tired, on the suggestion of Matheson, in great heavi­ness of spirit to pray. Kneeling on the grass, we continued in intercession for nearly two hours. It was one of those seasons of agonizing prayer which seem ever to precede a remarkable display of divine grace. It was the slumbering spouse arousing her­self with painful effort at the call of her Lord; the laborious undoing of the bars of the everlasting gates to let the King of glory in. By the end of the pray­ing the darkened sky began to pour down torrents of rain, and the mass of the people, with most of the speakers, were dispersed. The voice of Duncan Matheson was heard calling aloud, “Perhaps God is trying us by the rain; let us wait a little.” Gideon’s three hundred remained, and continued in prayer and praise. Mr. Campbell (Aberdeen), whose labours were so signally owned amongst us at that time, together with his friend our evangelist, and another, leading the services amidst descending tor­rents. Just as the sun was beginning to shine out again and the rain was ceasing, an extraordinary sense of the Divine Presence fell upon the whole as­sembly. Suddenly the Christians were filled with great joy. Simultaneously many of the anxious found the Lord, and began to break forth in songs of praise. Every one began to speak to his neighbour of the Saviour he was seeking or the Saviour he had found. On passing through the whole com­pany, we did not find one who was not either re­joicing in Christ or seeking Him with intense ear­nestness. The cloud of glory rested there for a season; and no visible signs or miraculous gifts could have added to the blessed consciousness and most veritable certainty of the immediate presence and gracious working of God. Till memory fails or the more “excellent glory” of the unveiled face of Immanuel obliterates the remembrance of faith’s brightest visions on earth, it is impossible for us to forget the awful nearness of God at that time, the overpowering sense of blended majesty, love, and holiness, the solemn gladness, and the soft, pure radiance of a Redeemer’s face that chased the dark shadows of doubt and sin away from many a soul. “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only be­gotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; . . . and of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Many of the believers, if not all, were then sealed anew, and they began henceforth to testify to the grace of God with great freedom and boldness. Some Christians who had never known assurance were then ushered into the full light of the Gospel; their bonds were loosed, and they en­tered into the liberty of the Sons of God. Many sought and found the Lord upon the spot. The door of salvation then seemed to be peculiarly near, easy of entrance, and inviting. Whilst you were pray­ing with an inquirer, he would break out, “Oh, I have found Him!” or “I see! I see!” And then followed the new song. Often, as we sung the opening verses of the fortieth Psalm, the light broke in upon the distressed soul, and peace followed.

After this the work went on prosperously; num­bers were found awakened at the close of every meeting. Many thousands attended the open-air services, and great power accompanied the word. The way in which many were converted, stamp the movement as the work of the Holy Spirit. A young man entered a church from sheer curiosity, and stood near the door in order that he might the more conveniently retire if aught should offend his ear. He heard the text, and heard no more. That led to his conversion. Another young man was return­ing from business one evening, when a serious thought took hold of him. Entering his room, he opened the New Testament at the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to John. “Seeing the open door,” he said, “I slipped in, and now I find Jesus to be the Way.” “When I saw that my sister was so changed and so happy,” said another, “I was afraid lest I should be left, and in my alarm I sought the Lord and found Him.” “One shall be taken, and another shall be left,” was a preacher’s text at an open-air meeting. A woman whose husband had been recently converted hearing that word was pierced to the heart, and thus brought out of dark­ness into the “marvellous light.” Another was carelessly passing by, and hearing the preacher sol­emnly repeat the question, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” was arrested and brought to the Lord. A man was sitting at his fire­side, when his wife returned from a meeting. Some­thing in her manner cut him to the heart; the re­sult was his conversion. A young woman scoffed and swore she would never attend revival meetings. Her wicked vow recoiled upon her. She feared she had sold herself to the devil. After a season of mental anguish, she obtained forgiveness, and led a new life. A young man came with his companion to an open-air service for the purpose of scoffing. He was awakened and enabled to receive Christ, at which his friend went away in a rage. “I won­dered why they were so happy,” said another, in reference to the joy of the Christians. “I was re­solved to get at the bottom of it, and had no rest till I found out the secret for myself.” One day, about the time the work began, a piercing cry for mercy was heard in a church. That cry was the voice of God to several persons, who dated either their first conviction or their conversion from that day. It was thus, they said, things unseen and eternal were made real to them.

A company of men were one night carousing in a public-house in the outskirts of Dundee, when the sound of voices was heard singing a spiritual song. It was a little band of Christian young women on their way home from a religious meeting, and they were giving expression to their joy in the Lord by singing—

“One is kind above all others,

Oh, how He loves!”

The words of the hymn fell with a strange power upon the ear of a young man sitting at the tavern table. The others seemed not to hear the voice of the singers as they passed: to him it was the voice of God. He was arrested by the Holy Spirit, and became dumb with silence. His companions were astonished. They thought he had suddenly gone mad. In vain they questioned him, in vain they jeered. He rose and left the house. As he paced the street in the darkness of night, the words of the hymn kept ringing in his ears. He thought of the love of that Saviour whom he had hitherto rejected. The thought pierced his heart, and he burst into tears. I shall never forget his subdued and grieved look as he made his way into my study and told me how God had smitten his heart in the public-house, and turned his pleasures into wormwood and gall. He seemed to see his sins in the light of Christ’s love. In answer to his eager inquiries about the way of salvation, I did not fail to preach Christ to him, and not in vain, I trust, as he entered at once on a new course of life.

As contrasting with this case and illustrative of the variety of means employed by the Holy Spirit to awaken sinners, the following instance may be given. A young man, well known to the writer, was living without God and without hope in the world. He was not conscious of a single thought respecting a future state, and did not so much as believe in the being of a God. His Sabbaths were spent in worldly recreation and pleasure. One Lord’s day in summer he was rambling in the fields. The sun was shining brightly, and nature was clad in her most beautiful array. As he looked on the smil­ing landscape, suddenly and for the first time the thought arose in his mind, All this must have had a beginning: whence and how did it begin? A long train of thought led him to the conclusion that the world must have had a Maker. Then came the ques­tion, Who is He? What is He? Again he launched out on a sea of speculation, and once more reached firm ground in the belief that the world’s Maker must be a living, personal Being, very great and very glorious. By this time he had lost sight of the beauties of the landscape, and felt as if he was alone with the Creator. Now another question arose: What am I to this glorious Being, and what is He to me? On this line of thought he entered with great reluctance, for he felt a misgiving as to the result, and feared He would discover things fitted to render him unhappy. But he dared not, he could not turn back. He felt he was like a man waking up in a dark cave with a solitary ray of light com­ing from afar. If he is to emerge under the open heavens he must follow the light. He tries, he stum­bles, he is stunned, but he rises, and again spying the glimmer of distant day, he holds on his doubtful course. He now said to himself, If there be such an one as God it concerns me to know as much as pos­sible about him. He then and there resolves to use all means to find out about God. He went home and betook himself to reading, meditating and rea­soning. The next stage arrived at was the painful conviction that he had never acknowledged this God, or done his duty to Him, and had in fact poured con­tempt upon Him by his negligence. As soon as a sense of guilt thus fastened on him, he felt he could ramble no more on the Lord’s day. Thenceforth he began to pursue his inquiries by prayer as well as reading and thinking. The light grew; his trouble increased. He would now see what Christians had to say in the matter; and accordingly began to at­tend the ordinary and special services of religion at a time when remarkable power accompanied the preaching of the Word. Here he found God. He found Him in Christ. He found Him at the cross. Now, this young man’s religious experience has al­ways seemed to me to be a good practical illustration of the text, “We shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord,” and also of Christ’s word, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my­self.” He seemed to act up to his light, yielding to the force of truth, truth in its own native energy with the superadded force of the Holy Spirit, in whose light alone we can see light. The logical faculty is strongly developed in him; and by that door the Holy Spirit saw fit to enter into his heart. He still goes on reasoning out everything. The other day I found he had just proved to himself on logical grounds these two things; first, that a Chris­tian ought to be filled with *humility and love;* and, secondly, that no religion but the religion of Christ can make a man *truly humble and loving.* After his conversion, he found recreation on the Lord’s day in teaching a class in the Sabbath-school. He is now prosecuting a course of study preparatory to the ministry of the Gospel.

Listen to a dying man. “Five years ago I was a drunkard, a profane swearer, an infidel, and little better than a beast. I heard the Gospel in the street. The Lord arrested me and turned me to Himself. He has kept me ever since, and I am saved. I am going to be with Christ, which is far better. Help me to praise Him.” So saying, he began to sing,

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,

Let me hide myself in Thee;”

and he literally sang out his last breath and died.

Look at yon grey-haired mother, whose heart is beginning to know joy for the first time these many years, as she clasps to her bosom her only daughter recovered from a life of folly and sin. “O my An­nie! my Annie! my ain lost Annie! I never thocht I wad hae seen you mair. But the gude God has been better to me than a’ my fears. Are we ever gaun to pairt again, Annie?” “Never, mither, never! Jesus has saved me Himsel’, an’ He has promised to keep me, an’ He will never brak His word. We’ll never pairt, mither; na, by His grace, never, never?” Nor did they ever part till the Lord Jesus came and took Annie away. I saw her de­part, and in the truth she went home as a bride adorned for her marriage. The daughter’s recovery led to the mother’s salvation.

A young man was one night awakened at a meet­ing, and began to inquire the way of life. Night after night passed; he was constantly present, but no peace came to his heart, and he grew worse. One evening Duncan Matheson took him aside into the anteroom of the hall, and said to him, “Now, are you really willing to have this awful business settled? Christ is willing, are you?” The young man replied that he was willing. They knelt to pray. As they prayed light and peace suddenly dawned, and the young man started to his feet in a tumult of joy and praise. Several of us, and among the rest the father of the young man, who was great­ly alarmed at the son’s despair, entered the room at that moment. Addressing the father, a Christian man, the evangelist introduced the son, saying, “Sir, this thy son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.” As the son rushed into the arms of his affectionate and overjoyed father, the heart of every one present was deeply moved.

A woman, mother of a large family, was one day awakened, and so heavily did the terrors of the Lord press upon her spirit, that she fled the house of God. She could bear preaching to sinners, she said, but when the people of God were addressed, it was too much for her. Some can hear the law who will not hear the Gospel. She became worse and worse, till at length reason seemed to be giving way. She dreaded to enter a place of worship because she was so wicked. At this juncture Mr. Matheson, who had frequently spoken to her, as a sort of last resource, said, “Well, I can say no more to you than this: do you as one poor soul did, who said, I will just lie doon here till the Lord lift me up.’“ Curiously enough this proved to be the grand turning-point.

She said to herself, “I will just do so.” In short, she ceased from her vain efforts of self-help, and cast herself on the Lord. Great was her joy. She was a wonder to her neighbours, who had witnessed her previous “madness,” and, better still, she has these many years maintained a thoroughly Christian pro­fession, and one after another of her family has through her instrumentality been turned to the Lord.

One evening a young lady of great intelligence and personal beauty, who was perfectly thoughtless and gay, was induced, as a matter of curiosity, to enter a certain place of worship. There was noth­ing new or striking in the service, she thought; “It is just the old thing,” she said to herself. One thing, however, struck her as the service proceeded, and that was the *solemnity of the preacher.* “Thething is evidently *real* to him,” she said to herself; and she could not but listen to him, although she imag­ined she knew all he had to say. The solemnity of the preacher impressed her. This impression was the opening of her heart, and by this gate the King of glory entered in. Her subsequent life was sin­gularly beautiful. She seemed to walk beneath an unclouded sky. Always trusting, always hopeful, always rejoicing, always ready for every good work—a most rare instance of childlike, progressive blessed discipleship. Her bright career was short. After a few years she took ill and died. A sharp conflict with the great adversary befell her in her last days; but she came up from that valley of humiliation “more than conqueror through Him that loved us,” and she felt assured, she said, Satan would never assail her any more. In her communion, which was singularly close and elevated, she seemed to speak to her Lord face to face. Her path from first to last was indeed as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

“I was fairly in the devil’s grip,” said a working man, in his homely, graphic way, as he told me the story of the Lord’s merciful dealings with his soul. “But Christ cam’ to me when I was little expect-in’ Him, an’ took a haud o’ me. Syne the deevil pulled me ae way, an’ Christ He pulled the ither way, an’ I had a sair time o’t. But I cam’ to ken that Christ is far stronger than Satan, an’ that was weel for me.” I was witness so far to this pulling, which seemed well-nigh to rend the poor soul in pieces. It was, doubtless, the tug of war—Immanuel laying siege to the city of Mansoul.

Let a different sort of witness speak—a gentle­man of the most accomplished type. “Several years ago I was, I regret to confess, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. From my infancy I was taught to re­spect religion, and despise everything vulgar and coarse. Accordingly I attended the house of God, maintained a fair reputation, fancied I was a good man, and had the best chance for heaven. Unex­pectedly God opened my eyes. This he did by means of the merest trifle—a petty act of mean­ness done to a friend, which somehow took possession of my thoughts, tormented me, put me off sleep, and led me to look deeper into my heart than I had ever done. Thus I was led to discover what I had never really seen before—my native depravity, and proud hostility to God. I saw that my own righteousness, to use the common phrase, was only filthy rags. I saw that my very religion was full of sin, and that, in fact, I had been going to church and to the Lord’s table just to patronize the Al­mighty and honour myself. I was now in a measure humbled, and was not ashamed to make my appear­ance at the revival meetings, where fresh light awaited me. You know the rest. I became indeed anew creature. So completely was my mind rev­olutionized, that the very hymns I used to hate as being exaggerated, Methodistic, and ranting, now expressed the deepest feelings of my heart. But the change was more than one of mere sentiment. Had I previously died I should certainly have perished.”

“ Sir,” said a woman to me one day whom I hap­pened to meet, “I am happier than I was on my marriage day.” Sometime previous to this she had been brought to Christ at one of the evangelistic meetings when Mr. Matheson was assisting us. Her husband, a drunkard and scoffer, was maddened by her conversion, and gave her no peace night or day. Her godly ways were intolerable to him. He beat her till her life was in danger; but she bore this brutal treatment with true Christian fortitude and meekness, rendering good for evil, and praying for his conversion without ceasing. “I am happier than I was on my marriage day. God has heard my prayer; my poor husband is converted. He is like a lamb, and thinks he cannot do enough to please me. Oh, sir, if you had but seen him the other night holding family worship for the first time! It was like heaven upon earth! There wasn’t a dry eye in the house; and our little lassie looked up in his face and said, ‘Father, yell win to heaven noo. An’ I’ll gang wi’ you; an’ we’ll a’ be there. I never thocht I wad like to gang to heaven afore.” Grace, mercy, and peace seem since that day to have rested on the house.

Yonder, at the corner of Ann Street, early on Sabbath mornings, you can see a fierce, tiger-like young man going about among the loungers, and begging a few pence to procure the drunkard’s in­dispensable dram. A few years pass, and the same young man is seen at the same street corner at the same hour on Sabbath mornings; but what a change! With his Bible in one hand, whilst the other is stretched out towards his hearers, he be­seeches them with tears to believe on that Saviour who has delivered his soul from the lowest hell. The preaching may be poor enough, but the man himself is a sign and a wonder. “I knew *the two Robert Annans*,”said one to me; “and when I re­membered the wild profligate begging a dram, and saw him now so meek and Christian-like, nothing ever impressed me so much, and I began to feel for the first time there must be a reality in religion.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

There were many striking answers to prayer. One of the most remarkable I may here give. A young woman who had found the Saviour at one of the meetings when Mr. Matheson was with us, requested special prayer one night on behalf of her brother, a sailor, who had not been heard of for a long while. Prayer was offered for the conversion of the wanderer. Some three months afterwards the young woman appeared at a meeting, and in­troduced her brother in a state of religious concern. Strange as it may appear, he had been awakened at sea on the very night on which prayer had been offered on his behalf. His own account of the mat­ter was this: He was pacing the deck in the still­ness of the night, when a thought about his soul took hold of him, and the more he strove to put it away from him the worse he grew. He had no peace until he returned home. We, of course, preached Christ to him. Why should we reckon such things incredibly strange? Does not our Fa­ther in heaven answer the prayers of his children every day? Has he promised, and will he not per­form? Where is our faith?

In many ways our evangelist rendered important service to the cause and work of God in this town. When the movement had nearly reached its limit, and it seemed as if the hand of the Lord was being withdrawn, Mr. Matheson, ever fertile in resources, and panting after greater things, suggested that a whole night should be set apart for humiliation and prayer. With his wonted energy and promptitude he arranged the details, and cleared the obstacles away. Accordingly a goodly company of praying men assembled in Euclid Street Chapel, and spent the night, from nine or ten o’clock till six next morning, in intercession. That night was to many present one of the most memorable seasons of their life. The sense of the majesty and immediate pres­ence of Jehovah rested on every soul. In the aw­ful stillness of the night watches we realized eter­nity. The fact that thousands of our fellow-citizens were sleeping on the verge of hell seized our minds with overwhelming vividness, and the whole com­pany were bathed in tears. O Dundee! Dundee! how hast thou been exalted unto heaven in the compassionate cries and anguished pleadings of those that loved thee even when they were hated by thee! May thy repentance turn away from thee the judgment of Capernaum! That night of prayer was followed by most striking displays of saving power. Instances of conversion sufficient to fill a volume could be here given; but I must forbear.

Of the converts, some are now in the ministry, some are missionaries, evangelists, Scripture-read­ers, elders, deacons, students, Sabbath-school teach­ers, and district visitors; while a still greater number are embraced in the less known, but hardly less useful, rank and file of the King’s army. Some of all those classes were converted through the instru­mentality of Duncan Matheson. To his sword, in­deed, which seemed seldom to return empty, ever fell a full share of the spoils of this glorious war.

1. See "The Christian Hero: the Life of Robert Annan." Same author. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)