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 VIII.

*HIS MANNER OF LIVING AND MODE OF WORKING.*

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URING the last years of his active life our evangelist prosecuted his work with unflagging zeal. He never rested save when he slept. He was often weary; but the more he was spent in the service of Jesus, the more he loved the work. Indecision never brought him to a stand-still. The silken cords of sloth never detained him. Every minute was an opportunity, and every opportunity was seized with an almost stern promptitude. Through the grace given him he could say, “I do not know that ten minutes of my life ever pass without thinking of the salvation of souls.” His motto was, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.” Often, when exhausted and sick, did he say, “Ah, I know the deep meaning of those words, ‘There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God;’” and the hope of that rest roused him, weary and ill though he was, to fresh efforts in the work of the Lord. Let us see how he spent his days.

The first part of the morning was given to prayer and reading the Word. Thus he refreshed his own spirit, and found a portion for others. To Christians he happened to meet he was wont to say, “Here is a sweet morsel for you—I have been rolling it like candy-sugar in my mouth all the day.” The portions of Scripture in which he found comfort were sometimes such as would not readily occur to others. For example, he would say, “I cannot tell you how much comfort I have found in this word, ‘If the righteous scarcely be saved.’ I find it so hard for me to be saved that I often fear I will never get into the kingdom; but then when I read that those who are saved are saved with difficulty, with just such a struggle as I have, I feel encouraged.”

In the earlier years of his course he spent part of the morning in sketching or writing fully out his sermons and addresses. A specimen of his outlines may be given:

FOLLOWING AFAR OFF.

“But Peter followed Him afar off.” (Matt. xxvi. 58.)

I. Point out those that follow Christ afar off. 1. Those who have some love, but grace is weak. 2. Those who are ashamed to confess Christ before men. 3. Those who walk inconsistently. 4. Those who do not heartily promote Christ’s cause.

II. The causes of following Christ afar off. 1. Weakness of faith. 2. Fear of man. 3. Attachment to earthly things. 4. Self-confidence.

III. The sin and danger of following Christ afar off. 1. It is not honourable. 2. It is not reasonable. 3. It is not comfortable. 4. It is not safe.

Part of his time was daily occupied in letter-writing. A benighted soul needs direction, a young convert needs warning, a persecuted Christian needs encouragement, a backslider needs healing, a poor saint needs money, a fellow-labourer needs succour: short, incisive, business-like notes winged with light are quickly on their way. In one letter he pleads the case of a neglected and poverty-stricken sufferer whom he has discovered in some out of the way hovel. In another he offers to find means for building a bridge over a Highland stream far away in the north, and as he urges the prosecution of the work with the greatest earnestness, you would fancy, if you did not know the man, that the erection was a matter of pecuniary interest to him, instead of being, as it was, an affair of pure benevolence. In all his letters he seems to breathe the air of eternity. “Oh, how near eternity seems!” is his constant exclamation. Death, judgment, heaven, and hell are realities never lost sight of; and in the forefront of every epistle, however brief, stands the name of the Master, too dear to be ever forgotten by the fond disciple—JESUS CHRIST, Saviour of sinners. It is not too much to say that by his letters, so prompt, wise, affectionate, full of the Spirit and of eternity, he was instrumental in conveying light and comfort to thousands.

His publications, and the circulation of books and tracts, formed part of his daily care and work, both at home and in his evangelistic journeys. Whenever or wherever you met him, you found him bringing out or putting into circulation some fresh tract or book. He studied the signs of the times. None knew better than he the tastes of his countrymen and the wants of the day. For instance, he brought out a cheap edition of Hoge’s “Blind Bartimeus,” and got it circulated in many thousands during the widespread awakening of 1859-61. He took the pains, and risk too, of getting it translated into Gaelic; and “Blind Bartimeus” was sent up many a Highland glen, and into many a sequestered nook, to tell of Him who openeth the eyes of the blind, and saith in his love to every needy child of man, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” His edition of Brooks’s “Cabinet of Choice Jewels “was seasonable and useful. For example, it was instrumental in the conversion of a young man who is now a zealous Sabbath-school teacher and elder in the Free Church. At one time we find him printing and circulating 300,000 tracts ringing with the genuine truth of the Gospel. Of this kind of literature, in fact, he circulated whole tons. He procured the translation into Gaelic of many little books which were gratuitously distributed, or sold at a merely nominal price.

To bring the Gospel before the eyes of careless men he frequently devised new methods. For instance, immense placards with “The Two Roads” described, being the substance of a discourse on the wide and strait gates, met your eye everywhere in town and country. I have seen it on the wall of a populous town in the strange company of quack advertisements and theatre bills, and have heard one passer-by say to another, “Stop, Jim, here’s a new style o’t.” They stopped, and read the old Gospel in a new style. I have seen it hanging up in a saw-mill in the corner of a dense wood in a wild Highland glen, where all who trafficked in timber read its sharp, soul-piercing truths amidst the dust and noise. It found its way into the ploughman’s bothy. “What are you doing?” said one to a couple of ploughmen in F\_\_\_shire, who, with hoe in hand, were scraping the walls of their bothy. “Ou, sir,” was the reply, “we’re just scrapin’ aff the deevil’s sangs, and we’re gaun to put up Christ’s in their place.” At this juncture the foreman making his appearance angrily forbade their proceeding further in the ornamentation of the walls, but the men stoutly made reply, “Deed, you never said a word again’ oor swearin’ and singin’ coorse sangs, and surely you’ll nae hinner’s frae worshippin’ and praisin’ God! Na, na; we’ll dae naething o’ the sort as stop. We’ll hae doon the deevil’s sangs, and put up Christ’s.” “The Two Roads,” with sundry hymns and spiritual songs were then pasted in the most conspicuous places.

He was watchful against the spread of error. Of all he ever published it would be difficult to find a sentence that could be fairly construed to mean error, or be held as likely to mislead a soul. Every little book had its mission; every tract was a messenger sent in the name of God. One was to awaken and alarm; another was to warn and reprove; a third was to persuade and win; a fourth summoned to decision; a fifth was fitted to comfort and sanctify; and all were sent forth in the name of Christ to seek and save the lost. Taking into account the quality and quantity of the seed, the breadth of deeply-furrowed soil that was sown in those days, when God’s great ploughshare was running sharply through the fallow ground and virgin soil of Scotland amidst sweet April-like alternations of sunshine and shower that then gladdened our happy land, it may be safely affirmed that the fruits could have been neither few nor small.

All the profits of the publishing business went to the gratuitous circulation of the particular tract or book then in hand. Although the entire burden lay on himself; his admirable business capacity and methodic habits enabled him to keep his accounts with perfect accuracy, and thus amidst a multitude of affairs to avoid confusion, if not also loss. It was but a subordinate part of his evangelistic work. The risk, indeed, was considerable, and the labour immense; but he sought no recompense save the reward that shines afar, and shines only to the clear eye of faith.

A portion of the day was invariably spent in visiting the sick, the aged, and the friendless. For this kind of work he possessed a peculiar fitness, and in it he found a peculiar joy. “You will miss friend Mr. Matheson,” I said to a Christian couple of feeble health and straitened circumstances. “Deed, sir,” was the reply, “we’ll miss him sair. He had a gey traffic wi’ us, an’ he was aye sae cheery. An’ mair than that, his hand was aye as ready wi’ his ain siller as his tongue was wi’ God’s promises. Mony a time he cam’ in an’ got’s greetin,’ an’ he wat sure to leave’s laughin.” He’s past the mournin’ noo; he’s weel hame, an’ we a’ maun try an’ win hame tae. But ‘deed, sir, we’ll miss him sair.” Into many a garret and cellar he carried the sunshine of an unclouded cheerfulness. His divinity was always served out with much humanity. Rare humours of fancy mingled with his spiritual sayings, and seemed no more out of place than children playing under the shadow of a great cathedral, or birds singing in a churchyard. As playful winds, seemingly of little use in nature, precede the genial rain, so his drolleries prepared the way for those tender touches of the deeper heart that call forth tears. Heavenly thoughts arrayed in symbols of the earth imparted interest to his talk. His conversation—proverbial, quaint, suggestive, always genial and often powerful—was scarcely less useful than his preaching.

To a timid young Christian he said, “Be what God meant you to be—a man.” To one whom he deemed unpractical he said, “Be real.” To a flighty one, “The Lord will clip your wings some day.” To a newly-married couple, “Mind this: A man canna grow in grace unless his wife let him.” To students preparing for the ministry, “Lads, tak’ a guid grip o’ God;” an advice which some of them appear to have laid to heart. To warn them against the deadening effect of classical studies he said, “Mind, Christ was crucified between Greek and Latin.” To a student who seemed to him to be in danger of intellectual pride he said, “W\_\_\_\_, intellect is the rock you’ll split on.” If that student, now in a high position in the church, has not made shipwreck, his safety may be in measure due to the advice of his outspoken friend. To a preacher who had crotchets he said, “B\_\_\_\_, preach Christ.” To one who was becoming a separatist: “You are doing the very thing Satan desires. If he cannot destroy a child of God, he will cripple him and destroy his usefulness.” To a Baptist disposed to make too much of the water he said, “Labour to bring sinners to the blood.”

To a Christian complaining of coldness: “You are cold because you are going away from the fire: keep nearer to Christ.” To young converts he would often say, “Keep about Christ’s hand.” “Few Christians shine; be you a shining one.” “If you wish to get *far ben* in heaven, keep near Christ on earth.” “You’ll aye get what you go in for,” was his homely way of stating an important principle of the divine administration.

To a desponding believer he said, “What would you sell your hope for?” “I would not sell my hope for worlds,” was the reply. “Well, then,” said he, “you are very rich, and need not droop.” “Oh, but I am so dead!” said another. “I never heard the dead complain in that way,” was his reply.

“A lady, an earnest Christian worker, whose creed is summed up in these three articles, “I believe in heaven, I believe in hell, and I believe in the third chapter of the Gospel according to John,” said to him one day, “Ah, Mr. Matheson, I have lost my peace and my hope; I fear I am going to perish.” His reply was characteristic: “What! you perish? I tell you, woman, if you went to hell, the devil would say, ‘What is that woman doing here, aye speaking aboot her Christ? Put her out, put her out, put her out!’” Curiously enough, that reply brought a relief to her mind which much reading, prayer, and conference with ministers and other godly friends had failed to supply.

To young religious professors he said, with much feeling and solemnity, “I often fear lest I turn out at the judgment day to be nothing but a hypocrite.” That was his way of warning them, and in some cases I know it took effect. More than one of those young Christians, awe-stricken, went home to search and abase themselves before God, and so were saved from the perils of self-confidence, if not also from delusions that ruin the soul. The fear of being a hypocrite, I firmly believe, was the only fear Duncan Matheson ever knew.

He had no idea of the uneducated lay-preacher affecting to be the fine gentleman or the clergyman. Meeting two young lay-evangelists, he said, “So you have become grand gentlemen,” glancing at the same time at their new and finely-polished walking canes. “Away with these showy things, and be like your Master.” To another he said, “L\_\_\_\_, when did you become a minister?” “I am not a minister,” was the reply. “Well, then,” said he, “put away your white necktie, and just be what you are, no more, no less.” Then thrusting a piece of gold into the young evangelist’s hand, he said in his kindliest tone, “This is to help to pay your expenses. I am not able to preach, and I must be doing something for Jesus.” These are little matters, but they serve to show with what godly jealousy he watched over his younger brethren, and how keen was his eye to discern the first step of pilgrims into Bye-path Meadow.

In a certain place where evangelistic meetings were being held, the lay-preachers, among whom was Mr. Matheson, were sumptuously entertained at the house of a Christian gentleman. After dinner they went to the meeting, not without some difference of opinion as to the best method of conducting the services of the evening. “The Spirit is grieved; He is not here at all, I feel it,” said one of the younger, with a whine which somewhat contrasted with his previous unbounded enjoyment of the luxuries of the table. “Nonsense,” replied Matheson, who hated all whining and morbid spirituality; “nothing of the sort. You have just eaten too much dinner, and you feel heavy.”

He had learned how to abound and how to suffer want; and he once said, “I have observed during all those years of evangelistic labour, that invariably when I have enjoyed most blessing in the work, I have suffered the greatest hardships; and, on the other hand, when I have been dined, and feasted, and carried shoulder high, there has been little good done.” He who is to be instrumental in gathering in the elect of God must taste of Gethsemane and Calvary. Christ’s tools are tempered in a hot furnace and sharpened on a hard grindstone. Luxury and ease are bad oils for the chariot wheels of the Gospel.

Speaking of the encouragement given by the Master to a young evangelist who was rejoicing in his first success, Matheson said, “The Lord gives these young soldiers victory without a wound; but when we are leaving a place we get a shot in the back to keep us humble and remind us that the glory belongs to Him.” He was very tolerant of the faults of young converts. “The Lord winks at their blunders and foibles because they don’t know better,” he would say. “Let them sing away; God Himself will teach them other tunes.”

“There is no use in your coming here,” it was said to him in a certain place; “for the people won’t come out to hear the ministers themselves.”

 “Well, then,” was his reply, “if they will not come out to hear broadcloth, I will put on fustian.” He was right.

Of pointless and unfaithful preaching, however pleasant to the ear or agreeable to the intellectual taste, he always said, “It is just Nero fiddling when Rome is burning.” “That was an excellent discourse,” said he one-day, after hearing a sermon, “but the meshes were too wide, and the fish would all get through.”

On hearing a certain preacher praised as being a fine speaker, he said, “Ay, but has he teeth?” He often quoted a saying of the celebrated divine, Dr. John Owen, to the effect that no preacher was ever successful who had not a certain “tartness,” pungent power, in dealing with the conscience. Of those preachers who by a skilful management of the voice make pretence of emotion, and as it were weep to order, he said, “They mimic the Holy Ghost: what presumption!” To a minister he said, “Preach hell. Few ministers preach it, and few people believe in it; but it is a great reality.” “Some good preachers,” he said, “are much too long in their discourses. They put me in mind of a man who, after driving a nail home, keeps hammering at its head till he has broken it and spoilt his own work.” He had no patience with ignorant’ lay-preachers, and often said to the young men, “Lads, sink the shaft deeper.” On one occasion a man, imagining he had a gift, requested permission to address Mr. Matheson’s meeting. This granted, the result was a sad display of ignorance, whereupon our evangelist, tap-ping him on the shoulder, stopped him, saying, “That’ll do, John,” quaintly and significantly adding, “Man, don’t you know the Shorter Catechism is a splendid book for learners? I would advise you to study it a good while before you speak in public.”

He was a good deal tried by the fickleness of friends, and he would often say of such as were not likely to stand in the day of trial, “He is nae to ride the water wi’,” adding, “I expect to have no more than two or three genuine friends when I come to die.” Once, when he was fiercely assailed for the Gospel’s sake, a man addressed him in terms of warmest friendship, saying, “Mr. Matheson, I will stand your friend.” Matheson, casting a penetrating glance at his new patron took his measure, and replied, “Aye, aye. You will stand by me when I am right; but will you stand by me when I am wrong? When I am right I don’t need my friends: I can stand on my own feet then. It’s when I am down that I need my friends. Man, will you help me when I am in the mire?”

“ When I preached at W\_\_\_\_,” he was wont to tell by way of illustrating a weak point in the friendship of some, “and gave away my books gratuitously, the people were my warm friends, and used to shake my hand very cordially; but when I stood at a corner with a clothes-basket full of books which I offered at half price, the good people did not recognize me. In fact they had suddenly become stargazers, and passed by without once seeing me.”

On hearing one tell with apparent self-complacency of a Christian who had fallen, he said with a tenderness of feeling that made the reproof all the more telling, “Ah, it’s him the day, an’ me the morn.” When shown a calumnious statement made against him in a newspaper, he said joyfully, “Man, I do like a little dirt cast upon me for the dear Master’s sake. I think Gabriel would shake hands with me and say, never had such an honour.’” “Suffering persecution for righteousness’ sake,” he would say, “is far better than a hundred dying testimonies of those who never did or suffered any thing for Jesus.”

“ Mrs.\_\_\_\_ died without giving any testimony,” said one of whom he stood in doubt. “What of that?” was his reply; “you had the testimony of her Christian life for forty years. If that be not enough to convince you, then hear my dying testimony just now:

“‘I’m a poor sinner, and nothing at all;

But Jesus Christ is my All in all.’

Do you believe that?”

He knew how to make a ploughshare of an enemy’s sword. “This is no time for preaching,” said one angrily to him in a market. “Look here, friend,” he replied, “you believe in the Word of God?” “Yes.” “Well,” said Matheson, “it is written, ‘Be instant in season and out of season.’ You say this is out of season. Well, we are just doing as we are commanded: we are preaching out of season.”

“These are men of strong passions,” was the sneering remark of another in reference to our evangelist and his fellow-labourers. “Thank God,” said Matheson, “we are men of strong passions. He has made us of strong passions that we may be strong in his service.” Nothing gave him greater pain than a blow dealt by a fellow-Christian. “An offended child of God gives the keenest blow,” he used to say; “he knows a Christian’s tenderest part” Yet even in this case he had his answer ready, “Now, just lay your finger on the commandment I have broken, and I will thank you. Which of the ten is it?”

In one place, where for a while he discharged the duties of a pastor, some who were sick complained that he had not paid them a visit. “Did you send for the doctor?” he asked. “Yes.” “Why, then, did you not send for me? Is it because you care more for your body than your soul?”

Another in similar circumstances said, “You might have missed me out of church.” “You are mistaken,” was his reply. “I go to the house of God as a worshipper and a preacher, not as a *detective*.”

When the managers of a congregation among whom he had laboured with every token of success for some time intimated to him that his services would be no longer required, as they could secure a preacher for ten shillings a week, he said, “Do you think you will get the worth of your money?” To this sarcastic question no answer was given. “Do as you have a mind,” he went on to say; “but I have a little money at present, and can preach for nothing. God is blessing my labours here, and I dare not leave the place. I will take a hall, and preach there.” On hearing all this, the congregation rallied around him. He was requested to remain, and his meetings were more crowded than ever.

His reproofs were often so sweetened with humour that no offence was given. Seeing several persons coming into a meeting too late, he said, “In the north a minister observing that a certain woman, though lame and scarcely able to walk, was always first at church, asked her how she managed to come so early. ‘Sir,’ she replied, ‘the hert gangs first, and the feet follow.” Those who come late, or for some insufficient reason never come at all, have been well named “the devil’s cripples.” Matheson did not spare such, and sometimes asked if anyone knew how they always grow lame every seventh day.

One day a gentleman called on him, and inquired if he knew a preacher who could suitably occupy a vacant pulpit in a certain large city. After some conversation, in which the evangelist endeavoured to ascertain his visitor’s ideal of a good minister Matheson said, “By the bye, do you know Mr.\_\_\_\_, a preacher somewhere in your neighbourhood? How would he do with you?” “I know him,” was the reply. “We have heard him preach repeatedly, but he would not do with us at all.” “Why so?” “Oh, he preaches damnation and frightens everybody. This is not the time of day for that sort of thing. He would never do, sir.” At this point the evangelist brought down his fist upon the table with a tremendous blow, and as if addressing the absent preacher, exclaimed with his loudest voice, “Bravo! M\_\_\_\_, bravo! my old friend. Thank God, you are still alive, and faithfully warning sinners of their danger.” Matheson’s visitor was astounded, and remembering he had an engagement at that moment, took up his hat and bade the evangelist good morning. In this way he stood by his friends, and this too he did at all hazards, as the following instance will show. A minister preaching in a market being assailed by a man under the influence of drink, Mr. Matheson interposed, and drawing himself up to his full height said, “If you strike this man of God it must be through my body.” At the sight of so formidable a barrier, the drunkard quailed and slunk away.

In the course of his itinerancy he once found himself in a strange, out of the way region without a friend, without lodging, and without means. It was drawing towards night, and he knew not where to go. Seeing a boy crossing a field, he called to him, and said, “Are there any godly people here about?” “Na, na,” replied the lad, “there is nae sic fouk in this pairish.” “Are there any believers?” asked the evangelist. “Bleevers!” exclaimed the boy; “I never heerd o’ sic things.” “Any religious people, then?” “I dinna ken ony o’ that kind; I doot they dinna come this road at a’.” “Well, then,” said the missionary, making a last attempt, “are there any who keep family worship?” “Family worship,” replied the lad, with a bewildered look; “fat’s that?” The boy, having taken his last stare at the curious stranger, was about to go. Matheson was at his wits’ end, when a happy thought struck him. “Stop!” he cried; “are there any hypocrites hereabout?” “Ou, aye,” replied the youth, brightening into intelligence; “the fouk say that \_\_\_\_’s wife is the greatest hypocrite in a’ the pairish.” “Where is her house?” “Yonner by,” said the lad, pointing to a house about a mile distant. Having rewarded his guide with a penny, the last he had, he made his way to the dwelling of “the greatest hypocrite in the parish,” and knocked at the door as the shades of the night were falling. The door was opened by a tidy, cheerful, middle-aged matron, to whom the stranger thus addressed himself; “Will you receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, and you’ll not lose your reward?” She smiled, and bade him welcome. The hospitalities of that Christian home were heaped upon him, and he spent a delightful evening in fellowship. In this way a lasting friendship began, and, what was better, a door of usefulness was opened to him.

 Talking one day to his fellow-passengers in a railway train about the concerns of the soul, he was called a hypocrite. On this he took five shillings from his purse, and said to his assailant in the hearing of all the rest, “I’ll give you this if you will tell me what a hypocrite is.” The man was silent. “You don’t know,” continued the evangelist; “but I will tell you. A hypocrite is one whose deeds are not consistent with his words and professions. Now I will give you ten shillings if you will point out wherein my actions are inconsistent with my profession.” There was no reply, and Matheson proceeded to improve the advantage thus gained by making solemn and pungent remarks with manifest impression on all present.

His practical good sense and ready wit were always at hand to help him. Some were objecting to receiving money for religious purposes from unconverted persons and people of the world. “I have no objections whatever,” was his reply. “*God’s people spoiled the Egyptians*.”

Sometimes his rebukes were very striking. To a lady, whose life was not in keeping with her light and privileges, he one day said, “It has cost you, madam, more trouble to get thus far on the way to hell than it has cost many to get to heaven.” Startled, she exclaimed, “Explain yourself.” “Consider,” he replied, “how many barriers you have crossed; a mother’s prayers, a father’s godly life, the remonstrances of conscience, heart-piercing addresses and faithful warnings; and above them all, and in them all, the loving arms of the Saviour. These have stood between you and hell, but you have overleaped every barrier; you have thrust the outstretched hand of mercy aside, that you might pursue the way to death. Tell me, are you now at ease?” The lady burst into tears, and requested him to pray.

“How is it,” said another lady jestingly, “that you godly folks have more trials than other people?” “Madam,” he replied, “the godly have all their hell upon the earth, just as you have all your heaven here; but when the redeemed are entering on their eternal happiness, you will be beginning your everlasting misery.”

“How can you bear up amidst so many trials?” it was asked of him. “I will answer that question,” said he, “in the language of an author I was reading the other day. ‘A child of God may be tossed by reason of corruption and temptation on a troubled sea; but that ship shall never be wrecked, whereof Christ is the Pilot, the Scriptures the compass, the promises the tacklings, hope the anchor, faith the cable, the Holy Ghost the winds, and holy affections the sails.’ No fear of our bearing up and getting through!”

He constantly endeavoured to give the conversation everywhere a spiritual turn; and this he could do in an easy and natural way. A Christian lady having got a sewing machine, he said, “Now I hope that, as the Lord gives you strength, you will use it in sending missionaries to the heathen, or in helping the Lord’s work in some way.” Calling when very weary at a certain house, the hospitable mistress prepared for him a cup of tea, with which he was a good deal refreshed. “When I get home above,” he said, “I will tell Him, ‘I was an hungered, and ye fed me.’”

On visiting friends who had removed to a larger house, he said, “Ay, you have got a big house, but I have a mansion up yonder.” One asked him if he had ever been wounded while at the Crimea. “No,” he said; “but many a time by the enemy of souls.” On hearing of a family who were interested in the Lord’s work, and counted by the world revival-mad, he said, “Oh, tell them from me to bite everybody they meet.” Just as he was parting with certain friends at A\_\_\_\_, the clock struck the midnight hour, on which he said with great solemnity and power, “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” As they were about to leave the house of a Christian family where they had been hospitably entertained, his companion made some allusion to the reward promised those who gave a disciple a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, on which he said in the hearing of all, “Oh, they have the best bargain!” On a similar occasion, as he and his two companions were going away, he said, “You may not be aware who your guests are: you have been entertaining three kings.”

One day as he sat in a railway train he sang a hymn, on which a fellow-traveller said to him, “You seem a happy man.” “Yes,” he replied, “I cannot be but happy; I am safe for time, and safe for eternity.” This led to further conversation, with which the gentleman was so much pleased that he invited Mr. Matheson to K\_\_\_\_, where he resided, to preach the Gospel there. His happiness was a powerful and effective sermon. By word, by look, and by deed, he was constantly testifying to the goodness of his God. “The Lord has been very, very kind to me,” was his frequent saying, and his cheerfulness was often more powerful to win than words of persuasive eloquence. But he did not overlook the other aspect of the Christian’s life. “How hard it is to live for eternity,” he would say. “Living above self and for God,” he added, “is real living for eternity.”

It was the custom of our evangelist to hold a meeting for prayer either at noon or in the evening. This was preparatory to the evangelistic service which he invariably conducted at the close of the day. Here he refreshed his own spirit and renewed his strength: here too the Christians were provoked to love and good works. An open-air service frequently preceded the meeting within doors. The singing and praying, the loud voice and bold manner of the lay-preacher, arrested the attention of the passer-by, and many who had never darkened a church door were thus induced to enter the place of meeting. Scenes of violence were not infrequent on the street, and the preacher received many a blow. At Forfar the roughs began one night to throw stones at the evangelist and his friends. “The devil is got weak now,” said Matheson, “when he’s throwin‘ gravel.” Turning to his companions, he said, “Cheer on! the enemy is at his worst, and Christ will soon triumph.” So it was. The tide turned; and a remarkable work of grace followed.

“You need not go there,” said one who deemed preaching Christ on the occasion of “an execution” of no use; “the devil has such power there.” “The more need, then,” was his reply, “for his being put down.” “We won’t protect you,” said the police at a race-course. “A higher arm than yours will protect me,” was his brave but meek reply. After a fierce assault made upon him, a Christian began to express sympathy with him; but he said, “Oh, what about that? They crucified Him.”

His meetings within doors were conducted in the usual way. His addresses were characterized by great fulness and variety. He could speak to the edifying of saints. With jubilant tones and a cheery pilgrim-like air he often preached from the text, “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Num. x. 29). With swelling emotions, and in sentences full of the music of his own joy, he loved to describe the happiness of that people whose God is the Lord. “Yes,” he was wont to say, “they are happy when they look back and remember the time when Jesus met and drew them to Himself in wondrous love. Happy when they look forward and see the pillar-cloud guiding them by a right way. Happy what they look down and reflect that they might have been weeping and wailing in the outer darkness instead of singing, ‘He took me from a fearful pit, and from the miry clay.’ And happy when they look up and think of the exceeding and eternal weight of glory that awaits them. Happy, indeed, is that people whose God is the Lord.”

But his speech was mainly directed to men in their sins. Some as they advance in their ministry preach less to sinners and more to saints. The reverse was true of him. “They say Duncan Matheson is nae growin’; he is aye preachin’ death and ‘judgment,” were his own words; “but,” he added in self-defence, “these are arrows I have often shot, and I have found them effectual; why change them?” “The children of God,” said he quaintly, “will waggle through ae way or anither; but sinners are in danger every moment, and so I keep at them.” “Lord, stamp eternity upon my eyeballs,” was his frequent prayer. As the light of eternity was ever growing more clear and piercing in his soul, his heart bled with an increasing compassion for the perishing. He was careful in discriminating between the saved and the lost, between saint and sinner. He would no more have assumed that all his hearers were true Christians than that all the pebbles on the sea-shore are diamonds, or all the birds in the hedgerows nightingales.

The almost-saved had their sad history and too probable end set forth in the description of a noble ship crossing the wide ocean, surviving many a storm, and then becoming a complete and hopeless wreck at the harbour mouth. “Near the kingdom,” he used to say, “is not in it. You may perish with your hand on the latch of heaven’s gate.”

To the careless, he often said, “There is a question which none in heaven can answer, and none in hell: can you? It is, How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

Many a time did the formalist and hollow professor quake as he heard himself described in a discourse from the text, “I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done “(Eccl. ix. 10).

Powerfully and affectionately did he plead with men on Christ’s behalf as he spake from the touching words, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” using homely illustrations of the truth. “A little boy, hearing his father read that passage aloud,” he was wont to tell, “rushed away from the window where he was playing, and looking with wondering and eager eyes into his parent’s face, said feelingly, ‘But, father, did they let Him in?’ Friends, you have heard the knock in some powerful sermon, some faithful warning, or when your cheeks ran down with tears and your very heart-strings were breaking as they lowered the little coffin with your dear babe into that cold grave. But did you let Him in? Perhaps you say, ‘I fain would, but cannot.’ A minister once knocked at the door of a poor, aged, and lone woman; but he received no answer. Louder, and louder still, he knocked. At length, as he kept his ear close to the door, he heard a feeble voice, saying, ‘Who is there?’ ‘It is I, the minister,’ was the reply. ‘Ah, sir,’ said the woman, ‘I am lying very ill, and cannot rise to let you in; but if you would come in, just lift the latch and open the door for yourself.’ The good man cheerfully complied, and went in to comfort the dying sufferer with the consolations of the Gospel. Now, my hearers, you say you cannot open the door yourselves. I well believe you. But there is a remedy for your helplessness; ask the Lord Jesus to open the door for Himself and come in. And He will come in. Believest thou this? Some of you who once heard the knock of Christ, hear it not now. Well do I remember being startled and kept awake by the boom of the cannon when I went to the Crimea. After a time, however, I grew accustomed to it, and could sleep amidst the roar of the artillery. So it is with many. Jesus knocks at your door in vain. His knocking does not trouble you now as once it did. In vain He pleads with you, telling you that His locks are wet with the dews of night. He is out in the cold, dark, wet night; but you care not. He is threatening to depart and leave you to perish; but you are too drowsy to listen or to care. Tonight He may go away forever. The last knock will be given. This may be the last one. What then? oh what then?”

Regeneration by the Holy Ghost formed a large and prominent part of his teaching. He had dwelt long beneath the awful shadow of this great mystery of grace, and he often said, “I have always been afraid to preach on that text, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” Yet he continually and most emphatically announced the necessity and explained the nature of the second birth. “Who made you a Christian?” he would ask. “Some are made Christians by their parents, some by their Sabbath-school teachers, others by their ministers and pastors, and many are made Christians by themselves. But man-made Christians cannot enter the kingdom of God. Friend, were you made a Christian by the Holy Ghost? They get their salvation from man, not from God. The sons of God are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’ ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.’” This great truth of the Gospel he proclaimed with no less skill than power, on the one hand avoiding the danger of making it a stumbling-block to the sincere inquirer, and on the other hand taking care that it should not jostle responsibility out of the field, and set men asleep on the damning excuse, “I cannot make myself a new creature; I must wait, and do nothing, till the Spirit comes.”

The sovereignty of God in the salvation of man, the sinner’s need of the Spirit’s grace, the helplessness, folly, and infatuated wickedness of the human heart, were truths written as by a pen of iron and the point of a diamond upon his innermost heart; and he always spoke as he believed. One day a friend referred in conversation to the errors of a low Arminianism that leaves no room and no need for the work of the Holy Spirit or the election of grace. Suddenly stopping, he said, “It won’t do, J­­­­\_\_\_\_; the truth is, you and I would be damned, if it were not for election. But that grips,” he added in a decided tone, at the same time clenching his fist. “Yes,” he continued, “that is true,” and suiting the action to the word, he added, “I know that if I had one foot in heaven, and Christ were saying to me, ‘Put in the other,’ I would not do it.”

Stating clearly the sinner’s guilt and wickedness, the evil conscience and the depraved heart, with equal clearness and force he proclaimed the twofold remedy—the blood of Christ and the all-powerful grace of the Holy Ghost. After setting forth the utter ruin of man, it was his manner to say, “Here is the sinner, and there is ‘the blood:’ the great question is, ‘How may these two be brought together?’ The answer is, ‘The Holy Ghost: He only can do it.’”

The Alpha and Omega of all his addresses, whether to saints or sinners, was Jesus Christ. “A full Christ for empty sinners” was ever his cry. “This man receiveth sinners” was a favourite text, from which he feelingly discoursed of the love, pity, and tenderness of the Lord Jesus in dealing with sinners. The Saviour whom he loved to preach was He whose great heart gave way, like the heart of a little child, when on the mount of Olives He burst into tears at the sight of the doomed city. The Redeemer whom he proclaimed was that Holy One who bore so rare a friendship for publicans and sinners. The Christ whom he held up to admiration was the same who took little babes in his arms to bless them, and received old sinners, like Zaccheus, into the same bosom, and saved them. He preached Jesus as able to save to the uttermost; whose arm of grace reacheth to the lowest depth of man’s misery and the farthest bound of man’s wickedness. It was Christ always; Christ more and more to the last; it was “Jesus only.” His preaching was but an echo of the announcement made by the heavenly host on that memorable night when the plains of Bethlehem were aglow with a softer, sweeter light than the light of moon or stars, and all the woodland rang with a music that ravished the shepherds’ hearts, and woke the sheep from their gentle slumbers, as those nightingales of another world—the angels—sang, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men.”

In short, Christ and Him crucified, Jesus risen and exalted to be a Prince, a Saviour, the Lamb of God, Substitute, Surety, Redeemer, the power of God and the wisdom of God to everyone that believeth—this was all his theme. And there are tens of thousands who will recall the image of the brave, outspoken, and genial preacher, asking with equal point and feeling the question he never wearied asking, “What think ye of Christ?”

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer’s ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,

And drives away his fear.

“It makes the wounded spirit whole,

And calms the troubled breast;

’Tis manna to the hungry soul,

And to the weary rest.

“Jesus! my Shepherd, Guardian, Friend,

My Prophet, Priest, and King,

My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,

Accept the praise I bring.”

At an early period of his course as an evangelist, Mr. Matheson was led to follow the practice of meeting with inquirers at the close of every service. “He came to preach at Stirling in 1858,” writes the Rev. W. Reid, editor of the *British Herald*, “when two meetings were got up for him, and at the close those who were anxious were requested to remain to be spoken to personally in the pews—a thing unknown before in Scotland. We remember how shy our dear departed friend looked when one said to him, ‘Will you speak to those in that pew?’ He did so with some hesitation; he said nothing about it at the time, but years afterwards he referred to it, and said it was the first time he had seen or done such a thing, ‘and I thank God that it was forced upon me, and the neck of the thing was broken, and that I was no longer content to fire at long range, but to come face to face with souls.’ He found it, he said, one of the steps by which the Lord prepared him and led him on in his work, and it was no strange thing for him ever afterwards, as long as he lived, to come into personal contact with awakened souls.”

Being a true fisher of men, he not only let down the net for a draught, but drew it up again to see if any were caught. Some may be too hasty in searching for results; but even a little impatience of zeal is better than the dozing indolence of those who, under pretence of honouring divine sovereignty, make no inquiry, and cannot so much as tell whether their net has enclosed minnows or monsters. The meeting for directing inquirers was a necessity of the sudden and widespread awakening; and, notwithstanding its occasional abuse or mismanagement, has served important ends in the work of God and the salvation of souls.

Many Christians will remember with gratitude and joy the first time they were brought face to face with a soul grappling with the tremendous realities, *sin*, *eternity*, and *God*. It forms an epoch in the life of a pastor, or of any Christian. You feel you are in the presence of an immortal spirit in the very crisis of its being. You see the battle, the agony, the portentous despair of a soul wrestling with invisible powers of overwhelming might; and you tremble as you behold the fainting spirit toiling betwixt wisdom and madness to roll back the rising billows of infinite sorrow and ill. You know you are in the presence of the Divine Worker, and you seem to feel upon your own spirit the very breath of the Life-giver as He breathes on the dry bones, and evokes a fairer form than Adam’s from poorer, sadder dust than the freshly bedewed soil of Paradise. Wise and patient dealing with inquirers is to a well-instructed believer one of the choicest means of grace.

Not many Christians, however, are qualified for this difficult work. During the period of religious awakening there was more or less patching of old garments and filling old bottles with new wine. The wound was sometimes too slightly healed, and comfort was given where blows were needed. If that old piece of legalism was abandoned, “Go home and read your Bible, and use the means of grace,” which in effect is to say, “Go and work yourself into a state of grace,” there was a rush to the opposite extreme in a species of bribing simpler ones into saying they believed, the great question being not answered, but hushed up. “Only just believe; just believe.” Very good; but what am I to believe? What is it to believe? How am I to believe? There is often an anchor in the deep that binds the struggling soul to the shores of sin and death. Not every Christian can grapple in the depths for the mysterious hindrance that binds the awakening spirit in unbelief. Some are gifted by the Holy Ghost for this part of the work.

In dealing with inquirers Mr. Matheson always took care to discriminate between those who, as he was wont to say, “had only a scratch” and those who were deeply wounded. To the former he would speak a word fitted to deepen conviction and pass on; to the latter he never failed to preach Christ. He also found two very different classes who spoke the same language, both declaring they had no conviction. One of those classes had indeed little or no conviction of sin, and he dealt with them accordingly. The other class were penetrated with a sense of sin, but could see nothing in themselves but utter hardness of heart. These often prove to be the best cases. He never failed to bring inquirers to the Word of God and the cross of Christ. His own experience was ever of great use in giving direction and encouragement. A full, free, and present salvation in the Lord Jesus was held out to every soul. If they were sinking in deep waters, Jesus was at hand to help them. If they had no right conviction of sin, as they said, they had the greater need to come at once to Christ to receive conviction, pardon, holiness, and every blessing freely from Him. Christ is the good Physician, and can deal effectually with broken hearts and unbroken hearts, hard hearts, proud hearts, fickle hearts, and all kinds of wicked hearts. “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh,” is the gracious and true word of Him who came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. “There was once,” said our evangelist, “a little bird chased by a hawk, and in its extremity it took refuge in the bosom of a tender-hearted man. There it lay, its wings and feathers quivering with fear, and its little heart throbbing against the bosom of the good man, whilst the hawk kept hovering overhead, as if saying, ‘Deliver up that bird, that I may devour it.’ Now, will that gentle, kind-hearted man take the poor little creature that puts its trust in him out of his bosom, and deliver it up to the hawk? What think ye? Would you do it? No; never. Well, then, if you flee for refuge into the bosom of Jesus, who came to seek and to save the lost, do you think He will deliver you up to your deadly foe? Never! never! never!”

In dealing with inquirers, his power lay not so much in the clear, terse way in which he stated the plan of salvation, as in his homely, genial manner of applying, like a kind and skilful physician, the balm to the wound. Not seldom, when others reasoning out of the Scriptures failed, he would come and try his easy, off-hand method, in which there was profound knowledge of human nature and true Christian wisdom, without any show of either. A young man of talent, now a devoted follower of Jesus, found himself at the close of a meeting in deep distress. “Downcast and sad,” he says, “I was stealing away from Mr. Matheson, whom I did not wish to meet. Wonderful love of Jesus! who marks our wayward steps, and still in tenderness and love calls after us, ‘Come unto Me,’ I was unexpectedly confronted by Mr. M., who introduced me to a minister. Hesitatingly I began, in answer to kind inquiries, to state my case, when Mr. M. laying his hand on my shoulder, said, ‘Oh, I know what’s wrong wi’ James. I know what James is wanting. It was a’ settled eighteen hundred years ago; but James is not satisfied with that, he would like something more. Isn’t that it now? But that’s enough, man. Let that suffice for you.’ In this way he held up the finished work of Christ, and relief followed.”

Such was the manner of his life and work. It was a life full of toil, weariness, and sorrow; it was also full of truth, and wisdom, and goodness. It was strangely checkered. One day we find him associated with the noblest in the land, who do him honour as a man of original character and apostolic virtue: next day he is out of sight in some obscure village, where he is despised and shunned by all save a faithful few. Now he stands up to speak by the side of the eloquent Guthrie, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church, who is not ashamed to acknowledge the evangelist and to share in his work. Many days have not elapsed when he is rejected by a little town for whose salvation he had laboured with heroic endurance: for his too pointed rebuke of sin he is driven forth amidst a tornado of odium so fierce, that not one of his Christian friends has the courage to stand up and say, “God bless him!” But whether honoured here or dishonoured there, feasted one day or starved the next, he held on his way with one noble end in view—the salvation of souls. In the midst of the world, with its huge, overbearing materialism, its gorgeous mammon-worship, its fascinating sensuousness, its carnal intoxications, its choice delights of godless pleasure, he saw nothing but *souls*, and spoke only of *eternity*. Men everywhere mad upon their idols he confronted in the name of the invisible God. To the intoxicated worshippers of Time he constantly presented the dread realities of eternity, demanding of them the sacrifice of a delicious, heart-ravishing present, and the acceptance of Christ and everlasting life, or the peril of hell’s pains for a refusal. With unconquerable long-suffering he thus held on his way to the end.