HENRY MOORHOUSE

The English Evangelist.

BY

REV. JOHN MACPHERSON,

AUTHOR OF

“*The Christian Hero*”*;*

“*Life and Labours of Duncan Matheson*”*;* “*Revival and Revival Work*”*;*

ETC., ETC.

“GOD GAVE THE BEST IN HEAVEN FOR THE WORST ON EARTH.” (Moorhouse)

LONDON: MORGAN AND SCOTT,

OFFICE OF “The Christian,”12, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, E.C.

*And may, be Ordered of any Bookseller.*

PREFACE.

ONLY in the last years of his life did I know Henry Moorhouse. It is from this standpoint, necessarily, that I have written the following pages. The materials, apart from my own recollections and impressions, were not very abundant; his letters, especially, were few. Throughout his public career he cherished a strong repugnance to writing accounts of his work, fearing lest the rehearsal should lead to self-inflation and the dishonour of God. If in this he erred, he erred on the safe side. He had seen egotism on his high pinnacle, he had heard him blowing his foolish trumpet, he had witnessed his swift descent into unfathomable mire, and was greatly afraid. This fear kept him in the place of safety and usefulness; and it imparted to his life and work a tone and quality of high excellence.

While many are loudly proclaiming that Chris­tianity is effete, the ancient gospel that converted the persecuting Saul of Tarsus into a preacher of the faith he once laboured to destroy, changed the dissolute Corinthians into saints, and triumphed even in the palace of Nero, is still proving itself to be the power of God unto salvation. Although argument is to be met with argument, and the religion of Jesus is able to hold its own on the ground of truth and reason, the gainsayer is often most effectively met by the production of veritable specimens of the work the gospel proposes to accomplish. Such a specimen is furnished in the character and life of Henry Moorhouse. So long as the religion of Christ performs moral miracles of this kind, the assaults of unbelief will be in vain.

Further, when the gospel in its sublime excellence, its true divinity, its saving power, is portrayed on the broad canvas of a life full of beneficent labours, the picture possesses a rare interest for believing men and earnest workers, and may, by the blessing of God, stimulate them in the pursuit of holiness and in the promotion of the Christian cause. In a word, if the Holy Spirit should condescend to use this little book as the vehicle of His omnipotent grace, whether for the comfort of some or the conversion of others, it will surely be a matter of unspeakable gratitude and joy.

HENRY MOORHOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

Early Days.

“And took his journey into a far country.”—Luke xv. 13.

Is the life of Henry Moorhouse worth recording?

An obscure Lancashire lad, in personal appearance puny and fragile, in speech rude and provincial, gifted with no wonderful powers, possessed of no learning, escaping by a rare marvel from the bottomless quag into which he had early plunged, becomes a preacher and a teacher; a preacher whose words awaken sympathetic responses in the bosoms of many thousands on both sides of the Atlantic, and a teacher, not of babes, but of teachers—wise and able men being not ashamed to take a lesson in the wisdom he had learned in no man’s school. A spark of wild fire, lurid and portentous, rising in the wilderness, borne hither and thither in the night, and ready to be quenched in its native marsh, is caught up into the firmament and becomes a star of no mean magnitude, whose silvery rays descend in blessing on the path of many a benighted wanderer. Who shall say that a light so curious calls for no investigation, deserves no passing notice?

Henry Moorhouse was born in Lyon Street, Ardwick, Manchester, on the 27th September, 1840. His parents belonged to the rank and file of England’s great army of honest working people, who are, as they have been, the real backbone of the nation’s strength and greatness.

His father, by religion a Methodist, is described by Henry as “a kindly, upright man;” a sort of character, happily, not rare in that religious denomination, to which vital godliness among the masses of England owes so much. With whatever eccentricities of system or pecu­liarities of teaching, it is the glory of Methodism to proclaim salvation through a personal, divine, omnipotent Redeemer, a Gospel of free grace to every creature. And although good old-fashioned Methodism is supposed to touch the things of God with a rude hand, it fails not to put the essential matter in a shape so homely and crisp that the popular mind can grasp it, and the most illiterate take it in. Certainly he were a poor—indeed an utterly unworthy—Methodist, who did not strive to write on the first page of his child’s memory “the Name that is above every name.” Little Harry Moorhouse would doubtless hear the story of Jesus ere yet ear or heart had become familiar with aught beside the sweet sounds and peaceful ongoings of a pure home-life. Nor would there be wanting answers to those ques­tions which a child of lively fancy and quick apprehension, like Harry, would put to his father regarding this simplest but profoundest of creeds, “Christ and Him crucified.” At any rate, the name of the holy child Jesus would be inscribed on the child’s memory, the story of the cross would be treasured up in some recess of the soul for a future day and purpose only known to God.

The elder Moorhouse was a teacher in Bank Meddon Sunday School. If glorying in ancestry were lawful or expedient, the son of a worthy under-shepherd of the great Christian flock might reckon he had as good reason to boast of his pedigree as any man in England. But if there be in this circumstance, the mere accident of birth, small ground for boasting, there is room for gratitude to Him, who, in His providence, as in all His ways, is “wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.” The Sabbath-school teacher would take his little chubby-faced boy to school, where, in his tender years, and ere yet his mind was much pre-occupied with other things, he could learn the alphabet of Scripture knowledge. These lessons would be enforced at home. In the house of the consistent teacher there will always be a pure, healthful atmosphere; the altar of God will occupy a high place, the lamp of the Word will be kept burning, the Lord’s-day will be observed, order will be maintained, and life generally will be sweetened by “the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Such influences as those, doubtless, left a certain mark on the susceptible heart of little, quick-witted Harry Moorhouse.

Now, apart altogether from the work of grace in the con­version and sanctification of men, it frequently happens that the little store of Scripture truth treasured up in childhood’s memory is in after-years, by the transforming touch of the Holy Spirit, transmuted into the fine gold of heavenly wis­dom, and the very lessons of infancy thus become, in measure, the strength and beauty of the Christian character. Early impressions of truth are sometimes the hidden link by which God, in the purposes of His grace, prevents sinners from passing beyond the region of possible salvation into the dark, unknown land of utter reprobation. They are as eyes in conscience into which the hooks of the Gospel fasten. At any rate, most Christians in looking back on early life and training, will find occasion to mark with adoring gratitude the mercy that anticipated all their future, and directed their first feeble steps.

How much Henry Moorhouse owed to the Sabbath school, and to the teacher who added to his humble office the untold influence of a father’s love, it is impossible to determine; but there is reason to believe that the lessons of childhood, dimmed and blurred, and all but blotted out during the period of his wayward youth, came out again in wonderful vividness before the fire of the Holy Spirit, and became illuminated characters in his early Christian expe­rience. Teacher, be of good cheer! It is yours to lay the wood and coals in order, which on some future day a celestial spark may kindle into a glowing fire. Your work may, for the present, resemble a heap of stones from the quarry, shot out upon an unpromising site; but the Holy Spirit is able of these rude materials to build within the soul the temple of God, whose very foundations shall be garnished with every precious stone. Uncongenial is the soil of many a young heart into which the seeds of truth are dropped; but under the quickening breath of the Lord, full often the buried germ comes forth in beauty and ripens into golden grain. A handful of corn scattered on the mountain-top is a thin sowing on a hapless field, just so much good grain given to the frosts or to the fowls; but one day a glorious sun arises on those arid peaks, and the seeds grow up like cedars, and a harvest waves with the glory of Lebanon.

At the age of twelve, Henry was put into employment in a shipping house, where, unhappily, he fell under the influence of wicked companions. Work gave place to idle fooling and reckless pranks. For his daring conduct in swinging on a “teagle” from a top story, he was by the master’s advice removed by his father to a new sphere of occupation, in a spindle and fly works. This change wrought no improvement; he loved the company of idle and foolish lads, and with them he would go.

The adventure of the “teagle” swing reveals not a little of his natural disposition, and partly explains the wild career on which he had now entered. He would outdo others in feats of daring, even if in so doing he should disregard all law and duty. To his ill-regulated fancy and foolish ambition, the very charm of heroism lay in madly passing beyond the limits of legitimate restraint and safety. And so he goes on to fresh adventures, to new forms of teagle-swinging from top-stories, finding greater zest, it may have been, in the perilous character of his ways than in the pleasures afforded by a life of sin.

About this time a new influence, at once gentle and powerful, began to operate as a partial check on his way­wardness. One who in subsequent years became more to him than all else in the world, was wont to meet him at school, and tried to win him for Christ. It was probably owing mainly to the influence of his faithful and gentle friend, Mary, that he continued to attend the Sabbath school; for, self-willed, impatient of all restraint, and mad upon his idols though he now was, his susceptible nature was unable wholly and at once to shake off the loving hand that sought to arrest him. Glorious and beyond all human comprehension is the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men; yet, for the most part, the invisible hand of grace employs some tiny link in nature to keep the sinner from passing into the outer darkness, judicial blind­ness, and finally-sealed impenitence; or, it may be, also to pave the way for the outgoings of mercy and the wanderer’s return. It may be a mother’s prayers, or a father’s counsels, or a true-hearted woman’s love, or a bitter memory, or an awe-inspiring dream, or the ineffaceable recollection of former happy days; but surely thus frequently does the Almighty Worker make use of some little thing to serve His highest ends, and so illustrate the glory of His own wisdom, power, and grace.

Although Mary did not succeed in winning him for Christ, her earnestness, her watchfulness, her love, held him in check for a time, and doubtless made a deep impression on his heart, despite the storms of sin that were now raging in his soul, and the dark clouds beginning to settle down upon his path.

“Ah, Harry! Harry!” from the bursting heart of his well-tried friend, was more powerful in his ears than any sermon could have been, in those days; but it was not suffi­cient to turn him from his ways. The work that needed to be wrought on him could not be effected by might or by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. Despite counsels, expostulations, remonstrances, and tears, Henry pursued his wayward course, going from one depth of folly to a deeper still, till at length it seemed as if he would finally disappear in the shades of eternal night. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.” Henry Moorhouse was no exception; his life was now a raving fever, a raging storm. He left his occupation and enlisted. It was a desperate attempt to quiet his conscience and keep his sin. In the army, as out of it, he was still the devoted soldier of Satan. His father, at serious cost, bought him off; but this kindness was cast to the winds: Henry went on in his dark career, going from bad to worse.

We must not draw aside the veil to gratify mere curiosity. Details of folly are little for edification. But we may not wholly conceal what Providence has not kept secret, lest we thereby diminish the Saviour’s glory in so wonderful a trophy of His grace. Finally breaking through every restraint, neither filial love nor the endearments of home, neither the claims of honourable friendship nor the influences of the most tender affection, neither the self- respect common to men, nor the dread of consequences here or hereafter, held him any longer in check. Joining heart and soul in the companionship of the lawless and the profane, he became the sworn associate of men who feared neither God nor man.

Force of character there must have been, where a mere boy of sixteen could command rough, bearded men, far stronger and wilder than himself. Beside drink and other vices, he plunged into gambling. A prince among card players, he won money by handfuls. A “chief centre” in the principal gambling hell in Manchester, he was backed against all players by the Satan of the estab­lishment, who pronounced Henry Moorhouse facile princeps on this diabolonian field. His adventures were sometimes desperate, but he was for the most part successful.

Possessing plenty of money, he spent it freely. Lost to all shame, one good thing remained in him. Even at his worst, he retained and cherished a feeling of pity for the poor. While a shilling was left him he could not pass a beggar without bestowing an alms. It was only nature; but it showed he was not past feeling, and the generous habit may have served to keep the spring of his affections from freezing into that icy solidity of selfishness which knows no thaw of penitence. So, men of wild passions and prodigal folly, who cherish some generosity of soul, sometimes find their way into the kingdom of God, when the mean, sordid, hollow-hearted professor of religion is left to pursue his course of respectable hypocrisy down to hell.

Amidst the high inflation of his animal spirits, the super-abounding merriment of jolly companionships, and the hey­day of successful sinning, Henry was often ill at ease. There was a skeleton in the cupboard, and the cupboard would now and again swing open. To face this grim thing he must needs carry on his person a loaded pistol, wherewith to shoot, not his neighbour, but himself, at what time the moment of despair might arrive. When he had spent his all, he would thus end all. In this there may have been an element of boyish bravado; but it shows he had reached that more remote region in the “far country,” whence few return.

Every fresh step he took in the way of transgression became harder and harder. His lawless courses brought him into frequent collision with public order and justice; he was not unacquainted with a prison cell. Once and again, in fits of sheer wretchedness, he sought by various means to take his own life; but each time an unseen hand foiled the desperate attempt. Thus the sinner pursued his sin, and mercy pursued the sinner.