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.*

CHAPTER II.

Conversion.

“And he arose, and came to his Father.”—LUKE XV. 20.

THE period in which the conversion of Henry Moorhouse took place was remarkable in the history of the Church of Christ. From 1857 to 1861, the Holy Spirit was poured out on whole churches and nations. Tidings of the great American revival were borne to this country like the breath of spring. It seemed to be the sounding of some mighty angel’s trumpet summoning men to prayer. Here, there, everywhere, men assembled for the sole purpose of calling upon God. Answers to prayer, many and marked, sud­denly became a striking feature of the movement. In church, in school, in cottage meeting, on green lawns, in highland glens, on lonely moors, in shops, in public-houses, in theatres, men were suddenly seized with a fear of God, a sense of eternal things, a belief in the efficacy of prayer, and a strong desire to obtain such mercies from heaven as may be dispensed at the throne of grace. In America, in Ireland, in England, in Scotland, and in many other parts of the world, the spirit of grace and supplication fell on the hearts of men of every creed and class, men without as well as within the Christian pale; and, true to the letter of the Word, looking to the pierced One, mourning for sin and the joyful song of deliverance followed.

It was an epoch in the history of many hundreds of churches and many thousands of families and souls. Like the first great movement of the Holy Spirit in apostolic times, this work was not without its “signs and wonders.” Marvellous answers to prayer, unexpected and astounding conversions, very miracles of grace, attested the special nearness and power of God. As, in illustration of His grace, the Master told the Jews that from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, Gentile men should come and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, so now sinners from every quarter of the world and every point in the compass of human society were gathered into the living Church. From the highest regions of social life down to the lowest, the Lord Jesus called a new company of disciples. On the one hand, the almost unconquerable spirit of pride was cast down in the conversion of the high-born or the self-righteous; and, on the other hand, the foulest demons of vice were dispossessed as the Saviour drew trophies from the slums. To that strange *terra incognita,* the more than African wilderness that is inhabited by the city Arab, the professional beggar, the pestilent loafer, the drunkard, the prostitute, the thief, and all the other poor, unknown, name­less things, mere fragments of humanity, shipwrecked in life, and cast hopeless on the cold shores of despair, the message of salvation was sent. As at the behest of an undeniable call, from those dark places many came forth, who, putting on Christ, began with bold testimony and new song to tell the world plainly that Jesus of Nazareth, the Friend of sinners, still lives. The world in its wisdom knew not what to make of this. It brought its measuring line, as is its wont; but this divine work was too high, too large, for the world’s little tape. “Stop!” cried they, “we shall soon see the last of it.” This means, “Wait a little; all those new Christians will either soon go back, or they will be dead and gone; and then we shall have peace.” But they did not go back; and although many of them are no longer on earth, many a true story of holy life and self-sacrificing toil remains to attest the reality and power of grace. Of these, not the least remarkable, as a trophy of the Redeemer’s power and a standard-bearer of the cross, was Henry Moorhouse.

In 1859-60, the work of God was making progress in various cities and towns of Lancashire. Labourers whom the Lord of the harvest had thrust into the field were reaping in plenty. The time was full of energy, hope, and joy. Great meetings were held in Manchester, where thou­sands, assembled in the Circus, in the Alhambra, and other places of meeting, were addressed by such well-known men as Wilbraham Taylor, Robert Baxter, Stevenson Blackwood, W. P. Lockhart, Reginald Radcliffe, Richard Weaver, Alfred Trench, Lord Radstock, and many more.

Among others converted at this period was Thomas Castle, one of Henry’s companions in evil. The young convert lost no time in seeking out his friend, and in setting before him all the inducements to repentance which his own experience of grace, mercy, and peace through Jesus Christ abundantly suggested. But in vain; the hardened rebel made no sign of surrender. He was prayed for; but there was no apparent answer to those prayers. He was taken to a friend’s house, where kind-hearted, fervent Christian men prayed with him and for him. It was all to no purpose; they might as well have spoken to the winds, or to the vulture hastening to the prey. He fled from the place; he sought to escape from the very scene of the merciful efforts made for his recovery. It was at this time he enlisted. The soldiering affair was probably a desperate attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord, the sound of whose gracious steps seemed more and more to trouble the ear of the guilty fugitive. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” This “no peace” is frequently the precursor of a clear conviction of sin. Better, surely, is the painful restlessness, the growing misery that dogs the heels of many a sinner, than the fatal confidence which dreads no judgment, and hopes for a tomorrow as abundant in sinful pleasure as the present.

Henry returned from the army, released from its stern discipline, but not less bound than before by the terrible rigours of the devil’s service. One night in December, 1861, as he was passing along Hyde Street, an obscure, out-of-the-way, back street, the attention of his companions was drawn to the cheerful sounds of praise issuing from a little room. They beckoned to him to come on. “Hallo!” he exclaimed, “what’s up?” To play a practical joke on him, they replied, “Lots of drink and fun.” The sound of the hymn-singing fell pleasantly on his ear, and he could not resist a sudden impulse to go in. The place was crowded, and he was compelled to take his stand upon the stairs. The people, consisting of factory men and women, were gathered together for prayer and the Word. Revival grace and blessing had reached that poor, benighted back street; some were rejoicing with “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” newly found in believing; others, deeply moved, were ready with bursting heart to say, “Sir, we would see Jesus;” and the audience generally were in good heart for hearing the Gospel. Edward Usher and two Christian brethren were conducting the meeting. The singing over, the reading of God’s Word followed. It was the parable of the Prodigal Son. The speaker, in his comments, dwelt on the words, “Bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.” The preacher, little knowing that the very prodigal was listening to his words, described such a case as Henry’s. The picture was well drawn; the reckless youth was forced for once to look into a mirror that reflected his own face in hideous, but too true, outline and feature. He felt constrained to recognize the likeness; his heart smote him; he said to himself, “Harry, thou art the man!” One word above all others pierced him; that word was “JESUS.” It was the Holy Spirit. A sense of guilt, piercing and in­tolerable, seized upon him as he stood on the stair; and such a tremor shook his soul that he was fain to catch hold of the banister to prevent his falling.

His first step was to return to the house of his father, who received him in love. Here, however, he found no rest; the great Father’s house was not yet reached, a terrible wilderness intervened. In his misery, he one day rushed out of the house, without his coat, and sought a neighbour­ing tavern, where he attempted to drown the voice of an accusing conscience in the intoxicating cup. But in vain. The drink seems to have lost its wonted potency; the more he drank, the louder did conscience raise its voice. He found he could not intoxicate himself, though he drank all day. Sometimes, in the case of an intoxicated man, sudden im­pending calamity has been known to produce immediate sobriety. Thus the enslaved and down-trodden soul re-asserts her power in a majestic and extraordinary manner over the tyrant appetites of the body. So, the conscience of Henry Moorhouse, quickened to a sense of sin, apprehensive of approaching judgment and eternal doom, refused to be silenced by the infernal spell of strong drink; and by its awful authority maintained a sobriety in the soul, in spite of deep potations, such as in ordinary circumstances would surely have produced the most abject stupor of drunkenness.

A conscience awakened by the Spirit of God, is a move­ment of Divine power scarcely less stupendous than the resurrection of a man from the dead. There are, however, qualms of conscience, agitations in the breast, and disturb­ances of false peace—common operations of the Spirit, as the old divines would term them—that may be quenched in strong drink or otherwise. Soothing the nerves, cheer­ing the heart, resting the brain, aiding digestion, by means of intoxicating liquors, is often nothing else than a self-deceiving method of excluding unpleasant reflections and of obtaining quietness of conscience. Coarse enough is the strong drink solace; it seems to be the broadest grin of irony with which the devil mocks a soul fevered in its sins.

And yet it works no greater havoc in the end than the more refined sops in which other consciences find their rest and hope. The last novel, the gay party, the whirl of business, some political excitement, a thousand petty passing interests, furnish many with all the peace they ever know, the only relief from the ghostly memories that haunt their souls. Or it may be alms and charities, professions and devout performances, good resolutions and solemn vows, the tears extorted from nature by way of a promise to “pay all,” or a compromise cunningly effected, as sup­posed, betwixt the world and Christ, like an arrangement among creditors, a compounding at so much as the estate will allow, or some one of the many other shifts which the sinner, too proud to accept the offer of free and un­conditioned grace, is wont to make. But whether it be drink or devotion, it is all the same in the end; that end is hell.

For three weeks he continued in this state, seeking rest and finding none. Sometimes he went to the Circus meetings, where he heard of the Name that is above every name, but he found no peace. His convictions deepened, and he sought in various ways to drown his misery. But the misery would not drown; this misery never drowns. His wretchedness always returned with increased intensity; the host of malignant and tormenting demons went on multiplying. Was there any chance for him? Unbelief answered “No!” He was too far gone; his day of grace was past; the Almighty could not do otherwise than punish such a one. Despair suggested the most fearful and wicked alternatives. “Go back to sin; nothing else is left you; take your fill of it; ’twill be all the same in the end. Or else, put an end to your miserable existence at once; plunge into the unknown; nothing can be worse than this; anything else might be better.” So he reasoned with him­self; now denouncing himself, now denouncing his fate, now wishing he had never been born; again softening a little, trying to pray, listening to wise counsels, and almost hoping for better things. But when those momentary gleams had passed, his darkness deepened, his anguish grew worse, “the pains of hell took hold” upon him, the terrible temptation to suicide assailed him, and his friends trembled lest his reason should finally give way.

Three hours of this has been more than many a soul could bear. Henry Moorhouse had three weeks of it. He was now learning one of the hardest and most necessary of all lessons—the evil of sin, the bitterness of departure from God, the madness of contending with the Almighty. In vain did he seek some alleviation of his distress; in vain did he resolve on some better course. He tried to hide himself from God; but he found he could not hide himself even from himself. The light of a holy Omnisci­ence and Omnipresence shone around him, blinding him, as the glory of the ascended Son of God blinded Saul on the way to Damascus. It seemed to him the intolerable glare of an eye that watched him, that found him out, that transfixed him, that judged and condemned him. He could go nowhere, but God was there. He could look at nothing that did not suggest the thought of an offended God. A whole age was crowded into this period of anguish and remorse; the dread and despair he now felt was such as to leave in his inmost soul ineffaceable impressions, memories that were his life-long teachers, and feelings that made him most pitiful and loving towards every sinful fellow-creature.

As Henry Moorhouse reeled along this pathway of sorrow, he fell into the hands of a wise and tender-hearted guide and counsellor. It was surely the good providence of God that found for him such a friend in the most terrible and critical hour of his need. Mr. Walter Caddell, whose hospitable house was open to inquirers for the way as well as to pilgrims on it, took Henry by the hand. Receiving him cordially into his house, Mr. Caddell exerted a kindly and soothing influence upon the distracted youth; and although he was not directly instrumental in leading him to the Saviour, he was used of God to hold up his goings at a time when reason often tottered under the load of sin, and a single false step might have plunged the unhappy lad into suicide and perdition.

One day he went to see a young Christian in the engine-room of John Rylands and Sons’ warehouse. His friend received him joyfully. There is a marvellous freshness, sweetness, and quickening power in the light that shines in a young convert’s heart. It is morning light, all the more beautiful by reason of the contrast with the shadows it is just chasing away. It is the first silver beam of the New Creation, and has in it the calm and rest of the first glorious Sabbath, when the Creator rested from His finished work. Better still, it shines with the ineffable serenity of the never-to-be-forgotten morning when the Lord arose, bringing out of His own grave the dawn of an eternal day. Young grace is full of dewy freshness, bounding energy, and triumphant song. If ever a man shall win a soul, it is then.

Henry found his friend rejoicing in the Lord. This did not mend matters; the contrast of his old companion’s joy with his own load of anguish made him worse. For the young convert to tell of his own deliverance did Henry no good; to bid him do as he had done was like sheer mockery; to assure him of Christ’s willingness to save him made no impression. Henry could not see it. Wisely, and doubt­less under the guidance of the seeking Saviour, the young Christian drew his friend’s attention to the very words of God. Turning to Rom. x. 8-10, he read, “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt con­fess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

“Now,” said the young teacher, “do you believe that? Do you believe in the risen Saviour, and that the work of redemption is finished, because Christ is risen?”

“I do, with all my heart,” replied Moorhouse.

“Then are you going to confess what you believe?”

“Of course I will,” was the ready answer.

“What then?” said the other, pointing to the words, “Thou shalt be saved.”

Henry trembled with a strange emotion.

“Oh,” he cried out, “I see it! I am saved!”

He saw, he believed, he rejoiced, he confessed, and he was ready from that hour to bear witness for Christ there or anywhere else.

So simple, so easy! say some. Too simple, too easy! say others. When the Holy Spirit teaches, it is always simple, always easy. The Lord can use even a blundering teacher and a mangled text. His own blessed word He is wont to use, and that, too, in a manner which unsanctified reason is not able to comprehend. Sinners are not saved by mere syllogisms on Scripture: yet God reasons with them thus, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” That is good logic, for it is “the wisdom of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

Awakened on a staircase; converted in an engine-room; found of the Spirit in a poor, little, vulgar meeting in the very unconsecrated ground of a back street; bound to the Lord in the bonds of the everlasting covenant in a noisy place of busy toil! It is the old story of Divine love and power rising superior to the petty circumstances of human wisdom and pride. The locality is nothing, the instrumen­tality is nothing; the reality is everything; the Lord Himself is all. Cathedral service or cottage-meeting; inquiry-room or engine-room: it is all one, provided only there is a true union of sinner and Saviour—Jesus cordially accepted, and the sinner giving himself back in hearty surrender. Where in all the world shall the blood of Christ be of none effect when it is applied? What day, what hour of the revolving year, shall this one word fail, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”? Jesus found Matthew taking custom at a toll-bar, the woman of Samaria at the well, James and John among the nets, the man possessed by demons among the tombs, Zaccheus among the branches of a sycamore-tree, the thief upon the cross, the Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot, Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, and Lydia by the river-side. Everywhere, in all sorts of situations, the Lord, when on earth, sought and found His own. I know not if, in His ministry in the flesh, Jesus found any sinner, or was found of any, in the Temple. He whipped the unholy traffickers out of their unlawful trade, but He could not whip them into a holy life. They were past all good, whether by whipping, or weeping. Yet that the riches of His grace may be known, He Himself tells us how the broken-hearted publican found the justifying God of mercy even in that “den of thieves,” the Temple. The question of the inquirer should not be, “Where shall I find Him?” but “Where shall I not find Him?” The question of the soul-winner should not be, “Where shall I win a soul?” but “Where shall I not win a soul for such a Saviour?”

A friend tells how on one occasion, shortly after his conversion, Moorhouse grew pale on meeting certain of his former companions in the street. It was some time ere he recovered his wonted composure. He then explained that his old associates were men of character so desperate, he feared they would take his life. His covenant with them was a covenant of death; his agreement was with hell. Out of such depths did the grace of God bring this young man! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire? And yet the difference betwixt one saved man and another is com­paratively a small matter. In the man of good morals it is nothing less than grace that saves; in the man of deepest shame it is nothing more. Vice is detestable; morality even without God is, in many ways, advantageous to men; the poorest morality is infinitely better than the least vice. But so-called good works before conversion are no more the cause of the saving change, than the bootless toils of a benighted traveller are the cause of the sun’s rising, by whose dawning light he finds the way.

The difference between one sinner and another is only a question as to the quarter of the pit where the perishing man was found. It may have been a cleaner corner; but it was in the pit. It may have been nearer the centre or nearer the side, more in the light or more in the shade; but, all the same, it was in the pit. If a man is drowning, he is drowning much the same whether it be in six fathoms or in sixty. If one is saved solely by the self-sacrifice of another, it will be a poor boast that his neighbour was perishing in foul water, but himself in clean. Truly, the salvation of any sinner is a marvel; the salvation of such a one as Henry Moorhouse is a marvel of marvels. The sum of the matter is, Grace is sovereign, Salvation is free!