HENRY MOORHOUSE

The English Evangelist.

BY

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“The Christian Hero”;
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ETC., ETC.

“GOD GAVE THE BEST IN HEAVEN FOR THE WORST ON EARTH.”—Page 106.

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CHAPTER IV
Work in England and Wales.

“Son, go work today in My vineyard.”—MATT. XXI. 28.

HENRY’S heart aglow with all the ardour of a young convert, it was meet he should bear a testimony to the grace of Him who had wrought so great a work on him. Under the guidance of his friend and counsellor, Mr. Caddell, an opportunity was found. A large room in Walter Street, Ancoats, had, at the suggestion of some working-men recently converted at the Alhambra Circus, been taken by the gentleman just named for the preaching of the Gospel. Here two young ladies had gathered together some three or four hundred young women, for the double purpose of making garments for themselves, and of hearing about the garments of salvation. To this company Mr. Moorhouse delivered his first address. It may encourage some timid apprentice in Christian work to know that this his first attempt was a comparative failure. Often a good candle burns but dimly at first. The very cause of failure is sometimes the spring of success. Good is the diffidence that drives us to Christ; strong is the weakness that waits on the Lord. Ignorance of the Scriptures enfeebled Henry’s testimony; but by the urgent and oft-repeated advice of his friend he gave himself to the prayerful study of the Word. Had he spoken less feebly, he might have gone on without his friend’s counsel, and missed that which became the chief feature of his teaching, the very crown of his evangelism—his rare insight into the Word of God, and his power in handling it for the instruction and edification of at once the most illiterate and the most intelligent in any Christian assembly. A glib tongue, “a fatal facility of speech,” has impaired the usefulness of many a beginner; while the humiliating failure of others has led to faith and prayer, to power and success.

Not long after, it was proposed by the same friend to gather together in the Walter Street room as many thieves and other bad characters as could be induced to attend, for the purpose of hearing from Henry Moorhouse an account of his conversion, and a plain statement of the way of life. To this Henry agreed, and a large number of the lowest class were invited to tea. To each was given a printed card of invitation, in the following terms:—

NONE BUT THIEVES, ROGUES,
AND VAGABONDS, ADMITTED.
Some four hundred attended; there was an enormous consumption of victuals, and a terrifying noise. Henry failed to appear. Probably the remembrance of the past, not less than inexperience as a preacher, unnerved him. The meeting was addressed by Mr. Harrison Ord; and many, melted into tears, professed a desire to forsake their evil ways.

Henry’s business began to give him concern. The stock was largely composed of Birmingham trinkets, and the question arose whether the puffing of such articles was in strict keeping with the profession and duty of a Christian. His conscience became more and more uneasy. Relief came in a curious way. One day as he was busy selling, and doubtless indulging a good deal in the rattling wit of the profession, J. B., an eccentric character, a weird prophet-like man who wore no hat, and went about everywhere warning men of judgment to come, entered the shop and cried out to Henry, “Thou ought to be with thy Bible for souls, and drop that hammer for the devil.” It was a word in season. This was what he felt in his conscience. He thought he heard the voice of God in it. He left the business, not however in any dishonourable manner, or with any loss to his master, and went forth to preach the Kingdom of God.

In the early days of his Christian course Moorhouse came under the influence of Mr. John Hambleton, whose genial sympathies and ripe experience greatly helped him. Together they visited cities, towns, villages, and unfrequented rural parishes, preaching Christ as they went. Strangers, not always regarded with a friendly eye, and sometimes in want of every comfort, they bore up bravely amidst many discouragements, enduring hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Now and again, their wants were providentially supplied, and they felt that the watchful eye of their gracious Master was on them. Best of all, doors of usefulness were opened, and as they preached Jesus many believed.

In Halifax they found a remarkable opening. A work of grace was in progress, and it was given them largely to reap of its fruits. Night after night the Odd Fellows’ Hall was crowded; and many of the people, both old and young, were moved to tears by the simple and touching words of the boy-like preacher. Many, it is believed, were then “added to the Lord.”

The young evangelist’s first love had not abated, and his soul overflowed with peace and joy. So close was his walk with God that in sleep his lips moved in audible praise and in rapt fellowship. “Precious, precious, precious Lord Jesus! I praise Thee, O Lord! And I believe in faith that works for the Lord—faith that works. We want more love to Thee, Lord, and to one another. Lord, help us to walk humbly before Thee; to walk honestly before Thee; to walk truthfully before Thee—redeeming the time because the days are evil.” Again, “It is a blessed thing to know that God
keeps us, and it is a blessed thing to know that He does a great deal more besides. Thank the Lord! Thank the Lord! Thank the Lord! “These and other like expressions his companion heard him utter in his sleep.

In want of a text for one of his boards, Mr. Hambleton was supplied with suitable words one night as he lay awake and listened to Henry’s talking in sleep. “There I stood with a board, on which was printed, ‘Christ for me! Christ for me!’ and the poor people were singing so happy.” Then adding, “Praise the Lord! Mercy’s free!” he ceased and slept on quietly till morning. So “Christ for me! Praise the Lord! Mercy’s free!” became the simple gospel of the new board.

In Scarborough they preached in a theatre, enjoying much blessing in the work. Here many professed faith in Christ, some of whom are preaching the gospel to this day. Leaving that town, they pressed on to various towns and villages, proclaiming salvation through the Lord Jesus, with the usual results, the glad reception of the message on the part of some, and the sad rejection of it on the part of others. Here they encountered difficulties, there they met with persecution; but they endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and went on rejoicing in their great Master, until they arrived at the scene of the Shakespeare Tercentenary, at Stratford-on-Avon.

Here they were joined by Mr. Edward Usher, who brought with him a large supply of Bibles, Testaments, and Tracts. It needed high courage to face the excited crowd who had gathered from every quarter to celebrate the birth of the great poet. These did not want religion just then and there; and to be confronted by three simple men of God with their Bibles and boards was truly more than weak human nature in the circumstances could have been expected meekly to bear. Four hundred London professionals fiddled and sung, “He was wounded for our transgressions;” but that was a totally different affair, for while the prophecies of Isaiah and the holiest truths of revelation afford delightful entertainment when accompanied with first-class music, gospel texts borne aloft by the hands or uttered by the voices of redeemed men, is not agreeable to the carnal mind. “Sirs, it just comes to this in the end, Heaven or Hell? If you don’t come to Christ, you won’t go to Heaven when you die!” is much too grim a form of the gospel to afford amusement. It need not, therefore, astonish the reader to learn that the people gnashed with their teeth, tore the tracts and threw the fragments in the faces of the evangelists, and otherwise indicated the offence of the Cross with sufficient plainness. But they persevered in bearing their testimony to the truth: nor did they go without the rich reward of souls won for Christ. Going over to Shottingfield, they were followed by hundreds of the local peasantry, who listened with delight to the gospel, and in instances not a few were brought to the Saviour.
Passing on to Epsom they boldly raised the standard of the Cross amidst the wild excitements of the race. Nothing daunted by the rude jostling of the angry crowds, the raillery, the blasphemy, and the ferocious use of the horsewhip and all sorts of missiles, they preached Jesus and left the issue with their Master. To pass through such scenes is, to a fine, sensitive nature, scarcely less than the martyr’s fire. It was an ordeal demanding strong faith, invincible courage, and quenchless zeal. But such cross-bearing service never fails of success.

From Epsom they proceeded to London, Bristol, and other places, with varied experience, but never without signs of their Master’s presence and some happy indications of His blessing. Thus slowly they made their way back to Manchester.

Henry Moorhouse’s evangelistic labours were now incessant. Doors opened on every side; nor was he slow to enter. The “boy-preacher,” as he was called, began to be more and more sought after, the interest in his preaching, often raised by mere curiosity, not seldom leading to conversion.

In company with Edward Usher, he visited Oldham, Rochdale, Liverpool, and Chester, where, during the races, they delivered fifty thousand tracts in three days. Passing over the names of various places, where faithful service in the Gospel was rendered, and precious fruits gathered into the garner of Christ, we next find Mr. Moorhouse and Mr. Usher in Dublin. In the Irish capital they were warmly received by Mr. Fry, and the lamented Mr. Henry Bewley, with whom our evangelist formed a friendship of the most affectionate and enduring character. Here, and in many other parts of Ireland, a wide field of opportunity seemed to be providentially prepared for the young English preacher.

As usual, at first, his diminutive stature and boyish looks raised a prejudice against him; but his unaffected simplicity of manner and the soul of genial affection that animated his style quickly disarmed criticism: the quiet, gentle, insinuating power attending his addresses almost without fail carried his audiences with him. Imperfect though he was in knowledge, and sometimes crude enough in doctrinal statement, for he had not yet completed his evangelistic apprenticeship, his humble ministry was plainly stamped with the broad seal of heaven. The Holy Spirit used the fire of his zeal to kindle a corresponding flame in the hearts of many believers, and to communicate the first mysterious spark of spiritual life to many who had been, till now, dead in trespasses and sins.

In the theatre at Cork he and John Hambleton encountered a fierce, tumultuous mob of Romanists, whose too evident purpose was to prevent the preaching a free and full salvation through faith in the atoning blood of Christ. By yelling and other hideous noises and threatening demonstrations
they succeeded in drowning the voices of the preachers. One strange song they sang,—“We’ll hang Garibaldi on a sour apple tree.” But they did not, save in figures of speech, hang the evangelists, who by dint of that national courage that does not know when it is beaten, persevered until victory crowned their peaceful arms; and Mr. Hambleton was enabled to deliver the message of salvation.

From the time of his first visit to the Green Isle, Mr. Moorhouse was established in the hearts of the warm Christian people of that country as a Heaven-born preacher of the Cross. Sweetly and tenderly, yet without compromising one iota of the truth, he was enabled to preach the Gospel in a manner all his own, to old and young, to rich and poor, to learned and illiterate, everywhere diffusing a savour of Christ, and seldom without some marked spiritual result. Welcomed to the drawing-rooms and saloons of the great, he never lost his head, or forgot his place, or left his Master downstairs. A favourite with the soldiers, he knew enough of their life to be able to touch a spring of tenderness even under the redcoat, and frequently they were melted into tears. One very memorable address, among the last he gave in the neighbourhood of the Irish capital, was delivered at Black Rock. He happened on that occasion to be utterly at a loss for a suitable theme, when, in his extremity, his thoughts fixed on the text, “Let the inhabitants of the Rock sing,” from which he discoursed with characteristic freshness and power.

As a specimen of the evangelizing work carried on by Mr. Moorhouse the following is selected from the records of that period. Assisted by Edward Usher and Joshua Poole, he laboured for some time in the worst parts of Dublin, known as “The Liberties.” In this quarter live thousands of the poorest and most debased people in the Irish metropolis; and hitherto little had been done to carry the gospel to them. Services were held in the old Congregational Meeting-House with very remarkable results. At the meetings held by our evangelist and his fellow-workers, the attendance rose from fifty to thirteen hundred, many being Roman Catholics, with not a few of such as had never seen the interior of any place of worship. Great power attended the word, and many professed to believe it Christ.

At the first meeting a young man, stepping in from sheer curiosity, took his place among the audience. He was deeply impressed. For the first time his eye lighted on the invisible cross of the gospel: he saw, as he had never seen, the atoning sacrifice, the risen, loving Saviour. He believed and wept for very joy. His first step was to hasten home and tell what great things God had done for him. Next night he brought one of his sisters, who, smitten with conviction of sin, remained to the second meeting. Taken in hand by a lady, she was instructed in the knowledge of God’s way of justifying
sinners. It pleased God, by His Spirit, to bless the truth: the scales of unbelief fell from her eyes, she saw Jesus as the Lamb of God, and believing, went her way home rejoicing. At next meeting the brother and sister, now one in the Lord, brought another sister, with the burning desire and confident hope that this one also would, that very night, be numbered with those who are washed in the blood of Jesus. And so it came to pass, for she, too, was found of Him who came to seek and to save the lost. Unspeakable was the happiness of sisters and brother in this new and better family bond. Yet one remained; their mother was not in Christ. Deeply concerned about her salvation, much prayer was offered on her behalf, and every effort made that tender love could suggest. For the meeting on the following Friday night extraordinary prayer had been made, and with the usual result when the Holy Spirit is thus breathing in the souls of believers. There was a breaking down of hearts, many were weeping, and seeking the Lord; among the rest that mother. In the meeting for inquirers she found rest in Christ and began to rejoice with somewhat of the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Her son, hearing of what had taken place, entered the chapel, where he met his newly-saved mother. A touching scene was witnessed. Mother and son, meeting in the aisle, fell on each other’s neck and wept. Thus a whole family was saved.

Nor was this a solitary instance of the kind. Quite a number of entire families were believed to have entered the ark at this time. It was a memorable season. The hearts of believers were wonderfully stirred, and it seemed as if eternity had been disclosed to view. The evangelists were full of joy and power. For their encouragement in the work of Christ the following verses were written by a Christian lady:—

"Onward, onward, brothers! onward!
There’s a glorious prize in view;
Though the way be rough and thorny,
God will ever guide you through.
Take the sword of His own Spirit,
And with helmet on your head,
Be ye strong in Jesu’s merit;
Think—for you the Saviour bled.

"Onward, onward, brothers! onward!
Do not linger by the way;
Say to dying sinners round you,
‘Jesus calls to you today.’
Tell them what He is to you,
How He loved, long, long ago!
Tell them how He rescued you
From the depths of endless woe."
“Onward, onward, brothers! onward!
Soon your warfare will be o’er,
Soon you’ll cast your armour from you,
Landed on fair Canaan’s shore.
There, amid the ransomed throng,
You shall swell the note of praise,
And with loudest, sweetest song,
Sing of Jesu’s matchless grace.”

The following letter, which appeared in “The Revival” of April 13, 1865, lays bare the secret of his power:—

“DESIRE—PRAY—BELIEVE.

“It is now about a year since the Lord gave me faith to trust entirely upon His arm, and to leave all for the sake of Jesus. Since then I have visited many places in England and Ireland, and in some little measure the Lord has blessed my labours.

“Beloved brethren in the Lord Jesus, especially those brought to a knowledge of the truth during the last twelve months in Bradford, Halifax, Scarborough, and Chester, I wish to impress upon you the necessity of much prayer. This desire has been placed in my own soul by hearing the Lord speak by Richard Weaver, the other night, in Dublin.

“When the Lord made me happy in Jesus, about three years ago, I spent every night either in prayer or praise. But after a little while my desire for prayer cooled down, and I was content to pray twice a day. The Lord in mercy revived his work in my soul, and now my desire is to pray always.

“What precious promises are given to every one of us! and it is by pondering on what the Word of God really promises that we are led to act upon that Word. The Word declares that ‘what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.’ (Mark xi. 24). Now, there is large scope in these words; the Lord Jesus has not restricted us to any particular object. But whatsoever ye desire;—first there is to be a desire, and I believe the Spirit itself places that desire in our souls; and then we are to pray, for the Lord will be inquired of; and then we are to believe, and all things are possible unto them that believe.

“Beloved friends in Christ, have you a desire to see the Lord’s work revive in your town or family? Would you like to see sinners crying out for mercy and made heirs of glory? Do you desire to see the arm of the Lord awake, and miracles of mercy wrought in this your day? If so, thank God there is the first thing, ‘what things soever ye desire.’
“Now Christ said, ‘what things soever ye desire when ye pray.’ When and for how long ought I to pray? is the next question. Did not Jesus say?—
‘Men ought always to pray:’ and He gives us examples, such as the widow and the unjust judge, the man and his friend. ‘Pray always,’ means whenever I can get a moment with the Lord: at my work; in the house; at home or abroad; on my knees or on my feet; in my bed or at my business; pray always, and faint not, for in due time we shall reap.

When ye pray, plead and wrestle with the Lord for that which is upon your soul, whatsoever it may be. If it be a revival of the gospel, pray for that. If you desire the conversion of your relatives, pray for that. Whatever good you really desire, pray for. There is no limit to your prayers if the things asked for be really desired.

“But the words of our Lord are, ‘What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe.’ The blessed Lord gives us whatever we desire when we pray, upon one condition. That condition is faith in Himself. The desire may be burning in our hearts, and we may pray always, and never faint; but the Lord has not promised to give us our desires for praying, but He is bound by his own Word to give us our desires if we pray believing. God cannot deny Himself, neither can He deny his Word, and if any of the Lord’s children, however unworthy, have the two requisite conditions—first the desire, and then the faith, and obey the injunction pray, God will surely hear, and in mercy answer.

“I ask your prayers for myself, and for all the dear labourers in the vineyard of Christ. May God give you a desire to pray, and faith to believe, that He will use us for his honour and glory. DESIRE—PRAY—BELIEVE.

“H. MOORHOUSE.”