CHAPTER XI.

1846-1847.

CALL TO THE CHINESE FIELD.

M

Y readers will remember a statement from my brother’s own hand of the circumstances of his first consecration to the missionary work, and of the re­markable train of events by which the fulfilment of his purpose was temporarily, though, as it seemed, indefinitely, delayed. That purpose still remained unchanged. He was still as much as ever, and all through those laborious and eventful intervening years, a missionary at heart, and only waited the intimation of the Master’s will as to the time and the place of his appointed work. He had heard the general summons of the divine Commander, “Who will go for me?” and he had resolutely answered, “Here am I, send me.” That answer had been recorded in heaven, and lived evermore within his heart. Amid all his home labours he spoke and acted under the solemn sense of it—spoke and acted as a missionary just about to go forth to a distant land, and only addressing a few parting words to his brethren at home ere the final summons to depart should reach him. How that summons came at last, and in what spirit it was obeyed, will be best told in his own words, in the continuation of the same statement just referred to, dated at sea, “Thursday, July 29th, 1847, lat. 25° 30′ south; long. 28° 40′ west.—

. . . From this time (July 23d, 1839) until the Disruption I appeared to have a special work to do in my own country, and having no call to the missionary field I thought no further of it than this, that I did not feel it would be lawful for me to *settle* at home, but only to comply with present calls of duty to preach the Word.

In the year 1843, and still more in 1844, I found my heart very much drawn off from the home field—the days of God’s great power with me seeming to be in a great measure past, and ecclesias­tical questions having taken so deep a hold on the public mind, that it was not in a state as before to be dealt with simply about the question of conversion. In these cir­cumstances I went at the call of some friends to Dublin in 1844 to try the field there, but finding no great open­ing I returned to Scotland, and the way being made very clearly open for my going on a visit to Canada, I sailed for Montreal, August 10. In Canada I found sufficient evidence that it was indeed the call of God which I obeyed in going to it; but after labouring there for nearly two years, and having gone over the ground which seemed providen­tially laid out for me, I felt that unless I were to remain there for life, the time was come for my departure. I was confirmed in this view by having had my mind afresh directed towards India by a letter from an acquaintance there, and also by a call from our continental committee to make use of my newly acquired knowledge of French by visiting the continent of Europe. I accordingly sailed from Quebec for Scotland on August l0th, 1846, having a deep impression that I should find no special work to do in Scotland that would detain me there longer than a few months, but feeling quite uncertain what would be my ultimate destination.

On my arrival I was asked anew to go to the Continent, but against this there were objections. I did not see any prospect of doing much there during a brief visit, and I could not but reflect that at my period of life it must be now decided whether I was to preach from place to place to the end or go to a heathen field, as originally destined. At any rate I felt that I could decide on nothing until I had paid a few visitsto those home fields with which I had formerly been connected. This work occupied me during the autumn and the early part of the winter. I might have protracted the period indefinitely, being encompassed with invita­tions on every hand; but as I did not see or feel any special blessing in this work, I preached no more than I could not avoid doing, and then came the question, What is my duty with reference to the future? About the end of the year, at the time of the Parsee’s ordination in Edin­burgh, I arrived at the clear decision that I was not at liberty to labour any longer as hitherto without ascertain­ing whether our missionary committee would still desire me to fulfil my original intention. I accordingly called on Dr. Candlish, and having laid before him my views, and joined with him in imploring divine guidance, he stated that he thought it was clearly my duty to go as originally destined to the heathen, provided that I found no special cause as heretofore to detain me, and said that he would confer with others on the subject. He did so, but found that though no one would object to my going if I wished to do so, yet as the Indian stations were all occupied, there was no special opening for me. At this very time, and while they were actually conversing on the matter, a letter came to the convener of the Foreign Mis­sion Committee, Dr. James Buchanan, from James Hamil­ton of Regent Square, London (convener of the English Presbyterian Church Missionary Committee), making earnest inquiry whether Dr. B. could point out any minister or preacher in Scotland who might be suitable to go as their first missionary to China, seeing they had contemplated this mission for more than two years, but had as yet been disappointed in finding suitable agents. This seemed to Dr. B. a providential coincidence, and without communicating with me, he wrote mentioning a few names and mine among the rest.

Some weeks elapsed without my hearing anything further on the subject; but meanwhile my own experience more and more pointed my thoughts and desires to the foreign field, and at last in the beginning of February a letter came to me from Mr. Hamilton, in which, after reminding me of my original design and prospects regarding an eastern mission, he mentioned the position of their own missionary scheme, and asked what my views in regard to embarking in such an undertaking now were. As he wished a speedy answer I could only reply that the matter was too varied in its bearings and of too momentous a character to be at once decided on; but that it would be the subject of prayer and consideration, as well as of conference with the ser­vants of God around me.

On receipt of my letter, their missionary committee instructed Mr. Hamilton to send me an express and earnest call to become their church’s first missionary to China. I received this, but still found myself unable to arrive at a final decision. Regarding the importance of the work there could be no doubt; but when I considered on the one hand the manner in which God had hitherto called me to labour, and the many calls at home and abroad which I still had to preach the word as heretofore; and on the other considered the uncertainty of my being suited to the peculiarities of the Chinese field, I felt embarrassed, and though I wrote a letter of acceptance, I could not send it off, but rather suspended the case by letting them know my difficulties, and my need of delay, with a view of getting further light. I also urged them in the interval to look out for others, and mentioned two ministers to whom they might apply. Another ten days elapsed, during which I was in Edin­burgh, as I had been for some time previously, preaching in St. Luke’s, &c., and now also assisting Dr. Duncan in his junior Hebrew class, his health being imperfect. The call to China was gradually assuming more and more import­ance in my view, and though some of God’s servants seemed to doubt whether it was a field suitable to my habits, &c., yet the prevailing opinion seemed to be that I ought to go. Feeling that I must resume communication with the English committee, I went out before doing so to Kilsyth, at the communion season on the first Sabbath of March, that I might sit, it might be, for the last time at the table of the Lord Jesus on earth with my beloved parents, and that I might have the aid of their counsel, and that of my cousins David and Charles J. Brown (of Glasgow and Edinburgh), who were expected to be my father’s assist­ants.

On the Monday after the communion I wrote to London again to let it be known that I was still weighing the matter brought before me, and that with a view to arrive at a final and satisfactory decision, I would be glad to be furnished with information in regard to the nature of the work in which they would wish or expect me to be engaged, and also to learn what length of time it would require to attain an adequate knowledge of the language with a view to preach the gospel in it. I also stated generally on the subject, 1st That I did not make such inquiries as if difficulties would be sufficient to keep me back, were the path of duty in other respects plain; but simply in order that I might have full materials for com­paring this call with others that were given me, as from France, &c. 2d. That as devoted to the missionary work I felt that unless it appeared that God detained me at home by some special call, I must go to *some* field where Christ had not been named, &c. In reply to this letter Mr. Hamilton wrote that he believed the difficulties of the Chinese language had been overestimated, but that they expected about the end of March from China Mr. Hugh Matheson, one of their committee, who would bring them full and recent information, and that this would be communicated to me.

At this time I spent four weeks preaching in Bute and Arran, and on the 10th of April I went to Edinburgh to preach in Mr. Moody Stuart’s. The impression of my duty now became so strong that I felt I could no longer hesitate about signifying my willing­ness to go, and on Monday I wrote to that effect. I saw that I would dishonour my profession of the gospel, and thus wound the honour of Jesus, if I seemed to linger any longer; and though I had not heard again from London, I felt that on general grounds, and taking even the most discouraging view of the case, it was my duty to go forward. The committee met on this very day, and so discouraging was the view given by Mr. M. of the field and of the missions there, as compared with our missions in India, that the committee resolved to recommend to the Synod about to meet at Sunderland the following Tuesday to give up thoughts of a mission to China, and begin in place a mission in Hindustan.

When I heard of this decision, which the receipt of my letter did not seem to have altered, I was at a loss how to act, but saw that now matters were coming to a crisis, and that the issue would be either to shut up my path toward China or set me free from their call altogether. I did not feel any sympathy with their proposal to draw back, and fearing lest they might do so, and thus dishonour the command and promise of the exalted Jesus, I was the more pressed in spirit to go forward, that such a consequence might be avoided. I accordingly resolved to go up to Sunderland on the 20th, and meet the Synod on the matter. I did so, and on Wednesday the 21st I found that the Synod were bent on prosecuting the mission, and so on Thursday I was ordained to the work. . . . In this manner from step to step my path has been hedged up in this important matter; and now I find myself in the midst of the great ocean studying Chinese, and having the prospect, if the Lord will, of spending the rest of my days in that vast empire of heathen darkness. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and to them that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

One or two sentences from the ordinary entries in his journal will complete the history of this interesting junc­ture, and throw some additional light on the circumstances of the call which now came to him, and of the posture of his soul towards it:—

“The call to this work came to me some months before I had full light to comply with it; but the way at last was made in all respects very plain. . . . On Tuesday, April 9th, I met in Glasgow James Denniston, returned from Jamaica, and on his way, if God will, to Constantinople as a missionary to the Jews. Thus, after so long an interval, we met again in the place where nine years before, at the University, he had given himself to the Lord to go to the circumcision, and I to go to the Gentiles. Having been so long engaged in other work, we had now the near prospect of entering on the fields in regard to which the vows of God were upon us. It was a confirm­ing interview. To sovereign grace be the praise—the end­less, unutterable praise! . . . I came up to Sunderland to confer upon the matter,” and “found to my joy that the mind of the Synod was to go *forward;* and I being now ready, and my way hedged in, I was next day ordained according to Acts xiii., and the day following I was in London. The Pres­bytery of Newcastle ordained me—the only one within whose bounds I had previously laboured; Dr. Paterson presided (in his own church we were met), being the only minister remaining in his place of those with whom I had laboured in 1841, &c.; William Chalmers[[1]](#footnote-1) preached at the ordination, being not only my cousin, but a minister born at Malacca, the centre of the early Chinese mission under Dr. Milne, &c. These were interesting coincidences; and still more so was the fact that Dr. Morrison, the first evangelical Chinese missionary, whose Chinese Bible I am now studying, was the son of an elder in the English Presbyterian Church, and was brought up as a Christian in the High Bridge Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne, where, in 1841, I laboured for three months, little thinking of such a position as that which I now occupy.”

My readers will willingly linger a little longer in the retrospect of this memorable ordination solemnity, which formed so important an era in the history of missions to the far East; and with this view will read with interest the following lines written at the time by an eye-witness, himself a devoted friend of the Chinese cause, and a deep sharer in all the hopes and fears and prayerful aspirations of that solemn time:—

“By far the most solemn and striking matter at the meet­ing of Synod has been the setting apart of William C. Burns as a missionary to China. Who could have believed that such would have taken place only two days before? Such an ordination has scarcely ever—if ever—taken place. It is perfectly marvellous. The thing was done suddenly (2 Chron­icles xxix. 36), yet I cannot think hastily, for God hath evi­dently been preparing his servant for it these months past. The more I reflect upon all the circumstances since the time of our first speaking to him on the 21st December, when we told him of the strait in which the Church was for want of missionaries to China, up to the decision of the Synod on the 21st April to ordain him the very next day, the more I am amazed at the wondrous things which have come to pass, and cannot doubt that God has been in them of a truth.

“On the 21st December, 1846, Mr. Burns was much at a loss as to the future; but seeing no open door, and no special call to labour at home, he placed himself in the hands of the Foreign Mission Committee to go to India, his original des­tination. The committee were obliged, from the state of their funds, to refuse his services. Shortly afterwards Mr. James Hamilton wrote to him, asking if he would go in the service of the English Presbyterian Church in the mission proposed to China. This was made the subject of much thought and prayer, and it was long before he could at all discover the path which the Lord was indicating in the matter. Dr. Dun­can strongly urged him to go; others as decidedly dissuaded him, and endeavoured to show to him that Scotland had still claims upon him. He himself inclined to go for a time to the Continent, and it was long before he could see that he had any call from the English Presbyterian Church, or that China was the field to which he should devote himself. On the 10th April he was still in darkness; on the 11th he preached in Edinburgh (St. Luke’s), from Jeremiah xv. 16, and John xii. 36, ‘Walk while ye have the light.’ Light dawned upon him that day; his heart was enlarged towards the heathen; his prayers were full of pleadings on their behalf. Next morning he came to breakfast, and to our utter amazement told us he no longer saw his way to refuse the call, and intended to write to London to that effect that day. A note received the fol­lowing morning mentioned that he had done so. His desire was to have a conference at the meeting of Synod the follow­ing week at Sunderland, when future plans might be decided upon.

“The very day he wrote his note, placing himself at the dis­posal of the church for China, the Foreign Mission Committee had a meeting, when it was decided to abandon China—to undertake Central India instead. The information which the Committee had received regarding the number of missionaries already in the field, the difficulty of acquiring the language, and the country being still so generally closed, led to that conclusion. Mr. Burns was informed of that decision. An elaborate report was drawn up in his best style by Mr. Hamilton to lay before the Synod.

“Tuesday morning the 20th April, at nine o’clock the com­mittee met in Sunderland. After much consultation the brethren came to one mind, that we must not abandon China—the Church was committed to it—and Mr. Hamilton was in­structed to draw up an entirely different report. No com­munication had been received from Mr. Burns; but the Church resolved that its duty was to keep by China, and to prosecute the missionary work there, as had been resolved upon two years before. Mr. Burns arrived in Sunderland the next day. His mind was unchanged. China was still his field, whether the Presbyterian Church abandoned it or no; and he was not a little amazed when he heard of the proceedings in committee the preceding day.

“The new report was read in Synod; Mr. Hamilton spoke and others followed. Mr. Welsh was asked to pray for guid­ance in the matter, and Mr. Burns was then invited to address the brethren. He did so; giving an account of his early life—his dedication to the missionary work—his arrest in Scotland, when the Lord gave testimony to the word of his grace, and the reasons for the resolution now formed. The people were much affected, as was the speaker; he was obliged frequently to pause, and at last to stop altogether. A meeting for con­ference was shortly afterwards summoned, at which he fully opened up his wishes in the matter, especially as regarded ordination. He wished to go forth only as an evangelist, not to administer sacraments; ‘Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.’ Acts xiii. was read; Mr. P. L. Miller prayed; and after much discussion it was resolved that he should be ordained the next day at ten o’clock, and proceed to China forthwith.

“The ordination services took place in a church in which he had often preached, and by a Presbytery (the only one in England) within whose bounds he had laboured for several months with no small success—a Presbytery from which Morrison also went forth, for his father was an elder of High Bridge Church, Newcastle; and not the least remarkable coin­cidence was the fact that the minister who preached had been born and baptized in China. The service was commenced by the moderator, Mr. Anderson, giving out Psalm lxxii. 8-11. He read Acts xiii., and sung Paraphrase xxiii. 11-15:

‘Lo! former scenes, predicted once

Conspicuous rise to view;

And future scenes, predicted now,

Shall be accomplish’d too.

Sing to the Lord in joyful strains!

Let earth his praise resound,

Ye who upon the ocean dwell,

And fill the isles around!

‘O city of the Lord! begin

The universal song;

And let the scatter’d villages

The cheerful notes prolong.

Let Kedar’s wilderness afar

Lift up its lonely voice;

And let the tenants of the rock

With accents rude rejoice;

‘Till ‘midst the streams of distant lands

The islands sound his praise;

And all combin’d, with one accord,

JEHOVAH’S glories raise.’

The prayers were remarkable for enlargement and fervency—bearing upon every point connected with the solemn work of the day. Mr. Chalmers took as his text John xix. 30, ‘It is finished;’ and viewed the words, 1st. In reference to God; 2d. to man—closing with an application to the occasion—what was left for Christ’s disciples to do. The ordination service was conducted by Dr. Paterson with extreme simplicity and apostolic fervour. After the questions had been satisfactorily answered, Mr. Burns knelt down—Dr. Paterson prayed, and laid hands on him—as did the other ministers, and so the first missionary of the English Presbyterian Church was ‘set apart by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery.’

The charge followed, which was suited to the occasion, and suited to the man to whom it was addressed. Dr. Paterson said, ‘This is a very solemn occasion to us, and it is also a very solemn occasion to you, dear brother. You yesterday told us how the Lord had directed your heart to offer yourself for this work, and to respond to the call of the Church to go forth unto the Gentiles. You told us that you did not require to return to your home, but were ready to set out with your little scrip on the morrow. And now, I would address to you the words of the Lord to Saul, ‘Rise, brother, stand upon thy feet,’ &c., Acts xxvi. 16-18. You have seen what few of us have; you have seen in the past the Spirit of God going forth in his wondrous power, giving testimony to the word of his grace, and the spirits of men bowing before him as mighty trees shaken by the wind. You have seen whole multitudes awed by his presence, and constrained to acknow­ledge that the Lord was revealing himself of a truth. Have you not seen these things? Can you not testify to them? The Lord hath now called thee for this purpose, that you may go forth ‘a minister and witness of those things which thou hast seen.’ While yet a stripling, he chose you for a great work, by which he designed to prepare a people for a great event, and to bring many forth to testify for the Lord Jesus Christ as the great and *only Head of the Church.* But he also sends you forth to testify of those things in the which he will appear unto thee—in which he will YET appear unto thee, ‘delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now he sends thee.’ Yes, brother, he has been preparing you for another work, and he will go before you to open up the way and guide you in all your steps. Verse 18 was then commented on by Dr. P. Dr. P. continued: ‘I charge thee there­fore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables’ (2 Timothy iv. 1-4). Yes, soon, very, *very soon* the time will come when they will not endure *sound* doctrine; for they have *naturally* itching ears, and turn away from the truth. ‘But watch thou in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, make *full proof* of thy ministry.’

“‘If nature be shrinking within you, if you feel yourself very weak in the contemplation of this great work to which you have been set apart, let me direct you to another passage (Matthew xxviii. 18-20), ‘ALL power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye THEREFORE.’ Yes, he has all power and all authority, and must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ‘The earth is *the Lord’s,* and the ful­ness thereof.’ He is King of nations as well as King of his Church; he has power to protect and uphold, and he will de­liver you from the nations unto whom now he sends you. Ah! look to him—to him alone. You may see the stars shining around you, you may think of many a bright light who has gone before into the dark places of the earth; but let me counsel you to turn from these, and look to Jesus. He is now on the throne, he will shield you, he will watch over you, he will send down an abundant unction on your soul, he will supply all your need. Go forth then in his strength. Remember that God hath given the heathen to his Son for an inheritance; re­member that Jesus hath promised to be with you always even unto the end of the world. Go forth even as a little child, led by Him who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and who holdeth the stars in his right hand. May thy dwelling henceforth be in the secret place of the Most High, and thy lodging under the shadow of the Almighty!’

“This brief sketch gives only an idea of the style of the address, which was listened to with great attention and under deep emotion by many of the congregation in the crowded church. Psalm xcviii. 1-4 was then sung:

O sing a new song to the Lord,

For wonders he hath done:

His right hand and his holy arm

Him victory hath won.

The Lord God his salvation

Hath caused to be known;

His justice in the heathen’s sight

He openly hath shown.

‘He mindful of his grace and truth

To Israel’s house hath been;

And the salvation of our God

All ends of th’ earth have seen.

Let all the earth unto the Lord

Send forth a joyful noise;

Lift up your voice aloud to him,

Sing praises, and rejoice.’

“After the service, Mr. Miller, formerly of Dundee, and Mr. Irving of Falkirk accompanied him to Dr. Paterson’s house, and were afterwards joined by Mr. Nisbet, &c., where prayer was made, and at four o’clock Mr. B. left for Newcastle, and preached that evening in Groat Market Chapel. I joined him there at ten o’clock. A considerable number were wait­ing to bid him farewell. We went to the lodging, sung Psalm c., ‘ALL people,’ &c., read Mark xvi., upon verse 3 of which he remarked how the women still went on, not know­ing how the stone would be rolled away, and applied it to our duty in similar circumstances. We spoke of how marvellously the difficulties had been removed already in this matter. He was filled with astonishment at the way in which it had been gone about—so little of man in the whole matter—so little preparation in the sight of the world—and the Church so harmonious. We prayed together and then parted. The next morning at five o’clock, I heard his heavy foot pass my door in time for the train to London, on his way to China as the first missionary of the Presbyterian Church in England.”

It will have been observed that my brother in finally accepting the call of the Synod declared himself willing, without returning even for a parting visit to Scotland, to proceed at once to his distant sphere of labour. It is said that when publicly asked in presence of the court how soon he could be ready to enter on his work, he replied with prompt decision, “Tomorrow.” This resolute tone and attitude of spirit waseminently characteristic of him. As a man that warreth, he entangled not himself with the affairs of this life, and moved about ever as a free and unencumbered soldier, ready at a moment’s warning to march at the Master’s command to any quarter of the world. Amongst the memories of his old classic studies the *miles expeditus*[[2]](#footnote-2)was ever, as I remember, a favourite name and idea with him, and to that model did he ever strive to discipline and brace his spirit. Long as he had doubted, and patiently as he had sought and waited for light as to the will of God in this matter, now that that will to him was clear he was utterly without hesitation and without fear. Even the difficulties which stood in the way, and which at that very time had been so greatly magnified as almost to have postponed for the time the attempt to enter a field so unpromising, instead of daunt­ing, only fired his spirit, and made him more impatient to press on, like a brave soldier rushing to the breach in a forlorn hope. “This,” writes he in his journal, “only strengthened my resolution to go forward, *fearing lest the name of that Lord to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth might be dishonoured;* and I came to Sunder­land to confer about the matter, when I found to my joy that the mind of the Synod was to go *forward.*”Now then that the matter was decided, his voice was for imme­diate action. The day before he had, I believe, left his father’s house with the fixed resolution that so it should be. He did not *say* farewell to those that were at home in the house, but he none the less and solemnly *took* farewell. “I was,”says an elder sister, “the only person at home when he left, our parents being both, I think, in the north. I remember Dr. Hamilton’s letter earnestly asking him to be the pioneer missionary for whom the English Presbyterian Church had been so long seeking. This letter was followed by one from Mrs. Barbour, in which she reminded him that in an address to the Students’ Missionary Association in Edinburgh, he had said to this effect, that when young men gave themselves to the Lord for the work of the ministry, they were not to prescribe to him where their field of labour should be, but should be willing to go anywhere, ‘*even to China.*’I re­member he smiled on reading this, and said he did not remember having said *even to China,* but went imme­diately and looked at the address, and said, ‘Yes it is—even to China.’

Before receiving this call he was studying the Gaelic, and seldom had the Gaelic psalm-book out of his hand, but soon after this we saw that the Gaelic was laid aside and the Encyclopedia was brought out, and he was busy studying the Chinese characters. I don’t think he gave a decided answer to James Hamilton before the meeting of the Synod at Newcastle; but having heard that some timid persons were daunted by some difficulties that stood in the way, he said, ‘That’s the very thing that makes my call clear to go,’ and at once packed his little carpet-bag to start for Newcastle. The day he went off he was long in papa’s study in prayer, and then coming out he silently wrung my hand and looked solemnly round as if taking a farewell look of the house; he had his Breadalbane plaid over his arm, and after reaching the front-door he turned and hung it up in the lobby, taking one belonging to his *mother* instead, and giving me an expres­sive look as he did so. I was very much overcome, and watched his receding figure with the feeling that he would not return. I went into the study to give vent to my feelings, and found the Bible left open at Isaiah lxiv., ‘Oh, that thou would rend the heavens,’ &c. On going up to the drawing-room I found the Gaelic Testament and psalm-book neatly put into one of the shelves, as if he had done with them, and I then said, ‘William will return no more.’ In a very few days, as you know, it was all decided, and the first announcement we received was from Mr. Irving of Falkirk, who kindly came straight from the Synod meeting to give us the tidings.

So he writes in his journal, the thread of which I now gladly resume:—“I had fully, though not formally, taken leave of all friends in Scotland before coming up to the Synod, and therefore thought it duty to act upon the text, ‘Let me first go and bid them farewell,’ &c., and without re­turning back to hasten on my way. This view approved itself to others, and I hoped to have gone off at once through France, and to have been in China in July by the steam communication lately established. This was over­ruled, however, on the ground that I would reach the field at a trying season, and by a trying route; and so it was resolved that I should wait for this present vessel, and in the interval visit the churches in this Synod. I have been accordingly in most of them—Liverpool, Man­chester, Birmingham, Brighton, London, &c. &c., and see much cause to adore the wisdom and grace of God in this delay. I do not hope again to see my dear parents before setting out; but my brother Islay and his wife from Dundee have come up to see me away, and were with me today along with two others occupied in my outfit (Mr. and Mrs. Ballantyne), when we took possession of my little cabin and of the ship for the Lord in the exercise of his worship. . . . My beloved parents still spared to us seem to rejoice in giving me up to the Lord for this ‘honourable’ work. Yes, ‘it is an honourable work,’ as Dr. M’Donald of Ferintosh said to me in his own veteran spirit, when the Lord permitted me to meet with him once more in Glasgow at the late communion there. . . . Before leaving Scotland I preached in Bute, Arran, &c., and had many calls to other places; but as no very special blessing seemed to attend the word, I did not feel myself at liberty to refuse a call to labour among the heathen, and that call came to me as one originally self-devoted to that work should the Lord call me. It is thus in one view a dark and solemn dispensation in my case to leave this land. I go away because, either through my sin or the people’s, God’s Spirit worketh not among us as in years past. But it may be that this is God’s own way of shutting me out from the home field, and sending me far hence to other Gentiles. ‘They essayed to preach the gospel, &c., but the Spirit suffered them not,’ and then the vision of the man of Macedonia appeared, and they ‘went over to help them.’ Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord? A man’s goings are of the Lord: how then *can* a manunderstand his own way? THOU wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Hosanna! Amen.”

In such a strain of exalted faith and hope, and with such solemn musings alike of the past and of the future, he closed the eventful period of his home and colonial ministry, and turned his face toward those new scenes to which his divine Master was pointing the way.

1. Now the Rev. Professor Chalmers, D.D., of the English Presby­terian College, London. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *i.e.* Without baggage or heavy armour, and so always ready for march or battle. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)