

CHAPTER II.

1832-1839.

PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY.

MY brother's remaining years of study at Aberdeen present nothing particularly worthy of record, except a visibly heightened tone of earnestness and energy in all his work, due to the higher motives and principles which now inspired him. A true Christian, he became more than ever an earnest student. Having learned to be faithful in that which is much, he became faithful as never before in that which is least. The result was seen in the higher place taken by him in all his classes, and in the University distinctions which began more than ever to crowd upon him. In his third year he was awarded the first place of honour in the senior mathematical class, and in the next following session he gained by public competition, along with another who was bracketed with him, the mathematical scholarship, then and for long afterwards the highest attainable distinction in the University; while in all the other branches of study he held a distinguished place. In other and higher matters meanwhile, he held on his constant way—not of course in a path of unclouded sunshine and uninterrupted progress, but consistently and steadfastly. The fresh and blessed experience which had attended his entrance on the spiritual life had indeed passed away, and been succeeded by an ebb of feeling over which he bitterly mourned; but the holy stream, fed by an inexhaustible spring, was never dried up, or ceased to flow in a strong and steady current. His religion, indeed, at this time was rather calm, serious, strict, and resolutely conscientious, than specially ardent and exalted; characterized rather by unflinching decision and strength of principle, than by any peculiar elevation of feeling or depth of spiritual experience. His life was more of the usual type, and moved more in the customary channels of Christian profession and obedience, than in after-years. There seems even to have been in him a certain tinge of the artificial and the legal—a tendency not uncommon with young disciples when called openly to confess Christ in the presence of those who have known them before in the days of their ignorance, to maintain a higher standard of outward profession and observance than is fully sustained by the state of the heart within. Of this he bitterly accuses himself in his first letter to his sister after his return to Aberdeen, and which is the only surviving fragment of his correspondence belonging to this period of his life:

Aberdeen, Friday, Nov. 16, 1832.— . . . “In regard to my own state of mind, I can say little that is pleasing. When I came here my spiritual state was very low, but I

hoped that the necessity which I knew there was of *my* walking carefully would, by God's blessing, have had a beneficial effect, making me seek nearness to Him and strength for all my emergencies; but I lament to say, I have been disappointed. During the first few days after my arrival, I am sensible of having been guilty of much hypocrisy, striving to make it appear that I was indeed converted, while I felt myself to be far from God, and acting I fear rather for the upholding of my own reputation than with a view to the glory of God. I might say much on this subject, but feel at this moment that although my entering on it is calculated to be beneficial to me, in bringing it more immediately before my own mind, and calling forth your earnest prayers in my behalf; yet the very feeling of having expressed my mind upon this subject may prove a snare to me, leading me to suppose that I have retraced my steps to the Cross of Christ, while I remain in reality unwilling to become His *wholly* and His *only*. May the Lord in His great mercy teach me my real character, and lead me to some just conception of His perfect holiness and hatred of sin, that I may prize as I ought that salvation which He has provided, and be made to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus! The counsel and sympathy of dear friends are then especially effective when they are absent; for as we delight to think of again meeting after being for a time separated, our views are directed to that blessed abode where alone there is a security of our dwelling in sweet and uninterrupted communion."

The state of mind thus expressed will not be difficult of comprehension to any who like him, after a spiritual crisis of more than usual decisiveness, have descended all at once to the common level of ordinary practical life. Clearly the views and convictions which then opened on his soul remained unchanged, but the fresh impressions and strong emotions which had given life and force to them had for the moment passed away. He still thought as justly, but he felt less intensely, and therefore moved and acted less buoyantly. He was faint, but he was still pursuing the same high end, and held his face unswervingly in the same direction. They who thus wait on the Lord, even though they may for a season faint and be weary, shall renew their strength. Though like the moulting bird they may droop as if ready to die, a new life will soon stir within them, and bear them upwards as on eagles' wings. Even in the dead calm and when the loose sails hang idly down, let us remember still the haven whither we are going, and turn our eyes ever wistfully thither, and the heavenly gales will surely soon return. How eminently this was so in the case of the subject of this memoir we shall in the sequel see. Even now the declension over which he mourned was more apparent than real—rather the mere transition from the flush of the morning to the light of common day, than any actual retrogression or even obscuration of the Sun. Meanwhile the light that was in him, dim and feeble as it seemed to himself, was not darkened, and could not be hid from others. "My mind," says Dr. Murray Mitchell, an old class-fellow, and now missionary of the Free Church of Scotland at Calcutta, "goes back to Aberdeen, and 1829, or rather November, 1828, when I first became acquainted with your brother.

We were class-fellows, at school and college, for three years. He then discontinued attending college for a year, with the intention I think of giving himself to the study of law. When he returned to Aberdeen he was an altered man. He came back full of holy earnestness, having in the meantime sustained the greatest revolution of which the spirit of man is susceptible, and seeking now every opportunity to converse with his old companions regarding Christ and His salvation." With this statement my own recollections of this period entirely accord. It was a time with him, I think, of steady, though not of marked or conspicuous progress. He was earnest and decided in his Christian profession beyond the standard of most, but still according to the ordinary style of the Christians of that time; nor had that overmastering sense of eternal things and of the infinite worth of souls, which at an after period carried him beyond all the barriers of conventional rule, and could be bound by no restraints but the clear and eternal laws of God, yet manifested itself.

Taking his degree with honourable distinction in 1834, he proceeded in the winter of that year to the University of Glasgow, with the view of prosecuting his further studies for the ministry there. The intellectual life of that ancient and famed seat of learning was in those days, so far at least as the public teaching was concerned, rather more conspicuous in the literary than in the theological department. The revered professor of divinity, Dr. Stevenson Macgill, had by that time fallen into the "sere and yellow leaf," and no longer exercised that effective influence over the minds of his pupils which he had done in earlier years. The air of the church history class was indescribably slumberous, and reminded one now of Spenser's Cave of Morpheus and now of Bunyan's Enchanted Ground; while our Hebrew studies were superintended by a professor of much intelligence certainly, but who knew almost nothing of Hebrew, and opened his course rather significantly by an elaborate refutation of the vowel-points. In the literary and philosophical departments again all was life and energy; and there was altogether, I think, about the place more of a true academic spirit than existed at that time anywhere else in Scotland. In the Greek class-room, especially, under the most fascinating and eloquent of teachers, Sir Daniel K. Sandford, there was an element of high enthusiasm which no one then at the University can have forgotten, and of which old pupils still speak with a rapture that almost looks like extravagance. The very music of his voice as he read the sounding lines of Homer, apart even from the brilliant translation and the rich feast of illustrative commentary and apt quotation, was a thing to go and hear. Within this charmed circle my brother was soon drawn, and supplemented by two successive sessions in Sandford's senior class the more elementary studies of his undergraduate course. At the same time the more proper work of the divinity hall was not neglected. If there was little life in the class-

room there was great life in the library, and around it. There were men at the hall at that time who were not likely to suffer any society of which they were members to sink into stagnation and ennui—such as James Halley, James Hamilton, William Arnot, Norman Macleod, with others of kindred spirit, though less widely known. No doubt, however, the systematic study of scientific theology must have suffered greatly from the want of the due direction and stimulus. What was done in the way of special lines of reading, in connection with a class exercise or a University prize theme, was rather occasional and spasmodic, than methodical and sustained. Such incidental calls, however, to studious application my brother promptly obeyed, and improved most strenuously. Returning from Aberdeen about the middle of April, after completing my own undergraduate course, I found him still in his rooms in Glasgow, working at the last of a long series of prize essays on Old Testament subjects for the Hebrew class, in which he had maintained a strenuous competition with another student throughout the entire winter; and either in this or in a subsequent session he devoted much thought and labour to an essay on the characteristics of Hellenistic Greek for a University medal, which he was fortunate enough to obtain. Altogether it quite struck me, that the atmosphere of student life in which he was now living was decidedly of a more living and stimulating kind than that which I had left behind. In the higher matters of the spirit it undoubtedly was so. Not only was there a higher tone of religious earnestness among the better part of the students generally, but there were among them individual instances of eminent devotedness and rare elevation of character, which could not fail to tell with quickening effect on others, and especially on one whom divine grace had made so susceptible to such impressions. Amongst these, besides James Hamilton, I would particularly mention the names of James Denniston, a fellow-student of his own in the divinity hall, and Charles Birrel, then an undergraduate in the University, and since an eminent minister of the Baptist communion in England. With these, and with other junior students whom in after-years he gathered more and more around him, he spent many hallowed hours of sweet communion in conference and in prayer, at once provoking and himself provoked to love and unto good works. Other influences there were working towards the same result, and which contributed to render this period an era in his spiritual progress, two of which I would especially commemorate. The one was the peculiar and powerful ministry of the Rev. John Duncan, then of Milton Church, Glasgow, and subsequently professor of oriental languages in the New College, Edinburgh, which during the two last years of his residence took a more and more fast hold of him, and opened to him deeper views of divine truth and more solemn aspects of the Christian calling and discipleship than he had known before. “One soweth and another reapeth;” one forges the weapon of steel, another

gives it its last tempering and its keen sharp edge. And so it was ordered of God that this singular instrument of his grace, who at the beginning and further progress of his spiritual course had been helped onward by other able ministers of the word, should receive his last touch of preparation for his great work from that scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God.¹ Certainly at least it seems to me, in the retrospect of those days, as if every Sabbath spent by him in Milton Church had been as a day in Patmos, and every sermon almost as an opening of the gate of heaven.

The other influence was that of the Students' Missionary Society in the University of Glasgow, of which he was throughout an active and zealous, and latterly a leading and influential member. That was a sort of focus and rallying point of everything that was most earnest and Christian both in the divinity hall and in the undergraduate classes of the University; drew good men together, and placed the weak side by side with the strong; brought home to us by essay or discussion, or through the well-worn volumes of our library, the shining examples of missionary faith and heroism—the Martyns and Brainerds of the past, the Marshmans and Duffs of the present—till our hearts burned within us, and we longed to go forth and mix ourselves with life, in the great battle that was going on in the church and in the world around. Here my brother was ever peculiarly at home, and breathed an element which was to him more than any other congenial and inspiring. It was here, and especially while listening to the weighty and earnest words of a missionary about to sail for China,² that he first rose to the full idea of that entire and absolute consecration of his whole being and life to the service of Christ, which in his subsequent ministry so remarkably distinguished him, as well as formed his first definite purpose of devoting himself to the missionary field.

Almost the only written memorials of this period are contained in a brief correspondence with one of those sisters who stood, as we have seen, in so close a relation to the beginning of his spiritual life; but these will be read with interest, both as illustrating some of the statements now made, and as marking generally the growing earnestness and solemnity of his views and feelings. Most of them are without date, except that of the day of the week; but I arrange them as far as possible chronologically, as they seem to me by internal indications to date themselves. The first was written, as the date shows, in the first year of his residence in Glasgow. The rest probably all belong to the last:—

¹ Besides Dr. Bruce, he had attended and much valued the ministry successively of Dr. John Murray, of the North Church, Aberdeen, Dr. Nathaniel Paterson, of St. Andrew's Church, and Dr. John Forbes, of St. Paul's Church, Glasgow.

² Dr. James Kalley, who was however prevented by the state of his health from fulfilling his purpose.

“DEAR JANE,—The accompanying packet arrived a few days ago from Paisley. Expecting it some time previously, I had prepared a few lines for you, to accompany it; but I waited in vain—and this among other causes has prevented me from sooner writing you. I am obliged to do so at present very hurriedly, but perhaps the principal interest of anything I might say would be owing to its coming from a brother who remembers you and a brother *at home*;³ and the merest note may serve this purpose.

“Dr. Macgill, after an illness that confined him nearly four weeks, resumed his labours a few days ago, and is now proceeding with all the vigour that is compatible with advanced age and great weakness. But we are not just dependent on his lectures for a profitable employment of our time, and the loss we sustained by his temporary absence is not so material as a stranger might imagine. I am attending, besides Dr. Macgill, the professor of Hebrew Dr. Fleming, an interesting and excellent teacher. And in addition to this, I am studying French under Dr. Gerlach of the high-school. I should consider him a very admirable teacher, and I hope I am making some progress under him. . . .

Glasgow, December 24th, 1834.

“MY DEAR JANE,—I am sorry, as usual, to be obliged to despatch the basket in so great a hurry as to prevent me answering as I could have wished your very pleasing note. It is indeed hard to be truly serious and interesting, while it is easy to be morose and dull, in the service of God; yet still we must not desist from an ardent pursuit of our high and holy calling, because of the difficulties which, from an utterly depraved heart and blinded understanding, it is encompassed with. Let us in this as in all things commit in humble but earnest faith our way to the Lord, and he *will* direct our steps—not thinking on the one hand that we can have too deep an impression of the value of immortal souls, and the danger in which we all naturally are, if it is counterbalanced on the other by a view of the glorious remedy, and the fullness and certainty of the Christian’s inheritance. O that we might live nearer to God, and then indeed if our manner may appear for a little less natural, it will become at length *naturally* serious and heavenly! I have had a very dull and unfruitful week, have been conscious of more heart-atheism than I remember of feeling, but am now, I trust, desiring in some measure that this discovery of my utter depravity may by God’s sovereign and precious grace be blessed to make me more humble and more grateful to the adorable Redeemer, who for such vile creatures as we descended so infinitely low and bore so much.

“I think highly of your scheme of Sabbath teaching, and hope that you will be greatly honoured and supported in it. Your affectionate brother,—WM. C. BURNS.

“*Rothesay, Thursday.* MY DEAR JANE,—I have from various causes delayed till this time writing home, in expectation, before —’s arrival, of every day seeing some of you; and since then, waiting the opportunity of his return home. And now when the time has arrived, I am disappointed to find that, owing partly to other engagements in the evening, and partly to a doubt whether or not — would go to-morrow morning, I must take to my desk when I should retire to rest. I cannot however think of allowing him to go without some little supplement to the intelligence which I have no doubt he will retail among you for days to come.

³ His sister was then in London.

“I have been enjoying Rothesay, since I saw you, in an unusual degree, the weather being so fine, and my health, in the great kindness of God, unimpaired. Nor can I reckon among the least of the present sources of pleasure the duties in which of course my time is a good deal occupied. I have an interesting little charge here, and one which I think I have increasing cause to feel at once responsible and engaging. I have this season the privilege, obtained by request from Mr. —, of joining with my pupils in the morning exercise of reading a portion of Scripture and prayer, which gives a new facility for bringing to bear on their minds and hearts the religious influence which God may enable me to employ, and accustoms them by practice to a duty which, imperative and fundamental as it is, they are unfortunately not yet otherwise acquainted with. I have many pleasing tokens, had I time to enter into particulars, of such an interest in all my pupils in those truths which must decide their eternity, as hang one between hope and fear on their account, and demand on my part a diligence and prayerfulness, which, now that I record this truth before me, I find, more than ever, I grievously want. O that I had grace to occupy my present little talent, instead of looking forward to a larger sphere, for when may I expect to be faithful if not now, and may I not here be privileged in Jehovah’s infinite loving-kindness, if ever I shall be so honoured, to tend the lambs of the fold of Jesus? it is unbelief and not faith, I find, that discourages the ambition. Let us provoke one another, my dear sister, to love and to good works; let us be steadfast in our efforts and instant in our prayers, and never forget, for *your* encouragement in the service of our Divine Master, that if I have ever yet known the precious faith of God’s elect, it was a letter from you and Margaret, in which I remember you spoke of being ‘pilgrims to a better country,’ that was first blessed to rouse me from the unconcern of an ungodly state.

“I wrote — some time ago and have had a letter in reply. His circumstances appear, from his account, in many respects very favourable for his improvement.

“ — appears to have enjoyed his short stay with me exceedingly, and we have been very happy together. He is a boy of very warm heart, solid and in the main thoughtful; a hopeful subject of grace he appears to me when I contrast his character and impressions of truth, as far as I can see these, with my own at a similar age. May the Lord make him his own, and prepare him, if it be his holy will, for important service in the advancement of his cause!

“We have been thinking of you in the enjoyment of your New Testament feast. In the strength of this food may you have grace to go many days. And now farewell, my dear Jane, and give my filial and brotherly regards to all at home and at Croy. Ever yours,—WM. C. BURNS.

“*Wednesday, 26th Sept. 1838.*—MY DEAR JANE,—I hope you will not misinterpret my conduct in not answering your note on Saturday. The subject to which it referred was of too important and solemn a nature to be lightly and hastily noticed, and I desired, first, to give special thanks to the Lord for his inviting us to correspondence on such topics; and, next, to seek by prayer and fasting to obtain light from his Word, expounded by the Holy Spirit, to guide me in regard to them. The time to write you has arrived, and my conscious deadness and spiritual blindness form a new argument to convince me of the need I have of using more vigorous and regular means for obtaining that advancement in the knowledge of Christ which can alone fit me to be an instrument in his hand for the advancement of his kingdom in the world.

“I am almost afraid to speak of some things, which, I believe in common with yourself, my convictions have for some time approved of as indispensable means of our growth in grace—my practice of these has been so irregular, and, at best, so far behind even my own dark and partial views regarding them. Yet it is the spirit of pride and legal hope, I am aware, that makes me shrink from these as if from a broken covenant, instead of casting myself again as an undone transgressor on the free covenant of promise; that in me henceforth *Christ may* live, and regulate all things according to his own good pleasure, and for his own glory!

“The great fundamental error then, as far as I can see, in the economy of the Christian life, which many, and alas! I for one commit, is that of having too *few* and too *short* periods of solemn retirement with our gracious Father and his adorable Son Jesus Christ. It is, we well know, when meditating in secret on his Word, when examining our hearts in his holy and omniscient but fatherly and gracious presence, when pouring out our complaint before him, and seeking to utter the praises of his glorious character and works—it is in these exercises that we come to know, through the teaching of the Spirit, our natural darkness, depravity, and vileness, and that the glorious Sun of Righteousness arises upon our souls with healing in his wings, giving light to us who sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death. The communion of the saints in Christian converse is indeed important, nay, indispensable to the growth of the new man when it can be obtained, but when is it sweet and soul-reviving but when each brings out into the common store something of the heavenly food which he has been gathering in the closet? Whenever the holy, heavenly light of a Christian deportment is seen in any one, when we hear him bringing forth from a full heart some of the glorious things of the kingdom, we ought then to learn the lesson that ‘he *has been* with Jesus,’ and to go in like manner to *Him* that we *too* may obtain this living water to be in us as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. I have alluded to this subject in connection with your proposal, which I would hail with joy, for ‘united prayer,’ because it strikes me from what I have felt that our object will be best attained by our stimulating each other to greatly increased fidelity in these regular and acknowledged means, instead of first adopting any special measure, which is only a burden and an impediment, except when it is like an additional channel dug for the conveyance of the waters which are overflowing their ordinary banks. O that our private and personal covenanting with the Lord were more frequent and regular! *This* would form some basis for united efforts in his service; but without it I fear we are in danger of neglecting the Lord’s own ordinance for means of our own devising. For myself then, dear Jane, I intend to-morrow, D.V., solemnly to review my duty in the private exercises of God’s worship, in the light of his Word; and may he grant it, of his Holy Spirit, that I may, by his promised grace, be humbled before him for past neglect of his blessed appointments, and resolve, in his strength, henceforth ‘to keep his statutes,’ not as a servant for his wages, but as a son from love to his Father’s presence and his Father’s laws. It will serve the end of these lines, dear sister, if they be a link in a chain of correspondence between us regarding the work of God in our own hearts, and around us. Such a correspondence I much desire, and much more need; and I am satisfied that had I been earlier thus engaged, I would have been more fruitful in the glorious work of the Lord, and have written, not as now I do to my shame, about the things of God with so ignorant a mind and so cold a heart. O may the love of Christ constrain us to live no more as our own, but as manifestly *his!* *This* is the motive that will carry us with a rejoicing heart through tribulations and distresses for his name’s sake; and make us count all things but loss

that we may win Christ and be found in Him, clothed upon with his spotless righteousness, and filled with his Holy Spirit. And now, desiring that the Lord Jesus may manifest himself to you in his surpassing beauty and matchless grace and love, I remain your affectionate brother,—WM. C. BURNS.

“P.S. I expect to hear from you soon. Let us be free, faithful, and affectionate, and seek to taste the excellence of *living* habitually what we *write* from time to time,—W. C. B.

“MY DEAR JANE,—I would not write you so paltry a note, were it not that writing to — has exhausted my time, and I cannot let another opportunity pass without thanking you for your kind and interesting letter, which I have not yet acknowledged; and expressing my desire that your mid-day period of solemn retirement may be specially regarded of the Lord, and that you may obtain new and remarkable communications of the Holy Spirit in all his vivifying and comforting power. I enjoyed my late visit very much, though, had we been alone, it might have been spent in closer intercourse on the things of the Spirit, and in special approaches to the throne of divine grace, and thus have been rendered more stimulating to us all. Mr. Denniston, I hope, will see you on Friday, and I hope that, through the presence of the Lord, his parting visit may be eminently blessed to your growth in the excellent knowledge of Christ.

“I am asking, though alas! with little becoming solicitude, whether the present is to be added to the list of our almost Christless sacraments. Would that the Lord would pour out on us the Spirit as in former days, and bring his saints into close and ravishing fellowship with himself! ‘Whither is our beloved gone?’ ‘Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?’ ‘Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?’

“In earnest expectation of his coming, let us wait day and night, and he will at last arrive to our infinite amazement and eternal rejoicing.

“My love in Christ Jesus to dear Charlotte, and believe me, your affectionate brother,—WM. C. BURNS.

“*Wednesday 17th, 1838.*—MY DEAR JANE,—I would have sent the basket sooner, but could not find the time necessary for despatching it; and I hope that we shall get it returned not later than this day week.

“None of us have been able to get out to Paisley as yet, but I heard of them yesterday. They are all, it would seem, well, with the exception of Aunt —, who I hear is confined to bed with cold, and is still troubled with her arm, which does not seem to mend rapidly. I paid a most delightful visit to Uncle Islay’s the other evening, when Mr. —, their new minister, was there, and expounded in a manner remarkably interesting and impressive. He seems indeed a very uncommon Christian, and has made me feel in some degree my own miserable ignorance in the excellent knowledge of the Son of God. O that I might know *Him*, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death! God forbid that we should glory save in the *Cross* of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to us, and we to the world! I trust, my dear sister, that you are obtaining some advancement in the knowledge of your own vileness and misery, and of the glorious righteousness and atonement of Emmanuel, our elder brother. Of such precious knowledge I can say little, but I would desire, I trust by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to fix the eye continually on Jesus, who is the finisher as well as the author of faith, and who will, as he is the faithful God, perfect for his own glory that which concerneth us. I am approaching, as you

know, an era of my history, if we except the time of conversion, the most important that can occur to a human being in this world—soon must I offer myself, miserable as I am, to the Church of God as a candidate for the work of an evangelist; and still more, that Church must decide, so great is the honour I have in prospect, whether in this land or among the perishing heathen it shall be my lot to preach to sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ crucified. In the meantime, O pray for me, and our dear brother —, as I now again resolve to pray for you, that, in our present respective spheres, we may be always living epistles of Christ, that may be known and read of all men, and be even now the means, in the hand of the Spirit of the Lord, of converting sinners and edifying believers! Especially for our dear brother’— let us plead unitedly, that he may be speedily given to the Church of God, and thus preserved safe unto the heavenly kingdom from those sins and snares of youth which have drowned so many in destruction and perdition!

“We had the privilege of being lately addressed in our missionary society by Dr. Kalley of Kilmarnock, ‘a good physician,’ who is leaving his present practice, which I understand is excellent, to consecrate his medical skill to the promotion of the cause of Christ in China, a channel which seems at present almost the only one open among that benighted people, so puffed up by their imagined knowledge in almost every branch of science and religion. Though *a* member of our own church, he goes out supported by the London Missionary Society, as the Committee of the General Assembly did not judge it expedient to extend the field of their operations farther east than India. He appears a most superior man, calm, but resolved and eager; and being one who I am informed was converted some years ago from a life of vanity, he seems, especially in prayer, to have obtained peculiarly deep views of man’s sin, and of the glorious grace of God. But I am forced abruptly to conclude, and am, I trust, your affectionate brother in Christ,—WM. C. BURNS.”

It was with such views, longings, and deep preparation of heart that he approached the period of his public dedication to the service of Christ in the gospel of his grace. The more secret exercises of his soul, in the immediate prospect of that event, may be still further gathered from the following jottings in a diary which he began at this time, and continued, with occasional interruptions, until the year 1853:—

“*September 19th, 1838.*—Here, if God spare my life, I intend to record from time to time the most memorable incidents in my life and in the experience of my heart before God, my Judge. Grant me, O my covenant God and Father in Christ Jesus! that it may be, through the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit within me, a faithful copy of the truth; and that I may be enabled to look on its contents with those judgments and feelings which a sight of the unerring record of thy book of remembrance will produce within my soul in the day of the Lord Jesus. Amen. This day I had the great pleasure and profit of meeting at breakfast in his lodgings, Mr. Davidson of the Training School, Inverness, a singularly advanced and amiable Christian, whose labours have been remarkably honoured of the Lord in the island of Coll, and for the last twenty years in his present situation. I have done very little to-day, but I have seen, I trust, through the light of the Spirit, that I am especially deficient in the knowledge of the *love* of Christ, and am mournfully defective even in attempting to set this before the unconverted. Yet surely this is *the* truth, the exhibition of which is of all most fitted to beget the confi-

dence of an appropriating faith, and to manifest the glory of the Lord's justice in visiting with *a* more awful damnation those who perish with Christ in their offer. O Lord! teach *thou* me to grow daily and hourly in the apprehension of thy unspeakable and sovereign love to me, a miserable sinner, that I may be constrained, out of the abundance of an overflowing heart, continually to commend thee to others who need thy love as much as I, and deserve it just as little!

"21st. These two days have been spent much as usual, and with nothing very remarkable, except that, which is most extraordinary because most uniform, when we notice it least, the continued and unchanging love of God in my preservation and support under an hourly increasing load of hell-kindling guilt. How needful to be daily plunged anew under the crimson tide of Emmanuel's blood, that I may walk in the light as God is in the light! I have studied Hebrew chiefly today, which Mr. Duncan teaches with great skill and activity. Wm. M'D—'s and W—'s lessons take a long time at present. I saw Mr. —'s brother, a spirit-seller in Calton, in bed; conversed and prayed with him. He seemed very ignorant of sin. May the Spirit convince him! None other can awaken truly either him or any other. The work of grace is indeed *God's* from beginning to end, and all the glory will be his. To his blessed name be praise, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

"23d, *Sabbath*.—*This* morning rose at 20 minutes to 7 and met my young men's class from 8 to 9. The attendance is increasing, and the prospect interesting. Mr. Duncan lectured in the forenoon on James ii. 12. Afternoon I addressed Mr. Patrick's little flock in St. Enoch's school, from John iii. 14, 55; and may well learn several important lessons from my experience. Last time I addressed the same meeting, a fortnight ago, I had made mere *mental* preparation, but, as I thought, was in some degree supported, and spoke with some force and fulness from Hebrews x. 19-22. Encouraged by this imagined success, I was content with a similar preparation to-day; and if the former case encouraged presumption, this does not less favour despondency. I felt little alive to the subject, my faith almost failed, and I was left devoid of conscious love to Christ and compassion for perishing souls—the affections which would have given fresh interest to the subject in my own mind, and have stimulated me to go through with its exposition and enforcement; as it was, I lost heart after discoursing for some time on our state as dying under the poison of the serpent's sting, and I stammered out some other scraps upon the remaining glorious topics of the subject, and came to an end,—concluding the whole service in an hour and a quarter, instead of the two hours of the preceding day. Oh! it is indeed an arduous thing to preach from supernatural views of divine, supernatural truths. The *Lord* must give these, or they cannot be attained. Yet notwithstanding, arduous preparation, in dependence on his power, in the closet and study, is, I am more fully than ever convinced from to-day's experience, absolutely indispensable, at least for me, to prevent contempt being thrown upon glorious truths from circumstantialities of looseness and superficiality which are easily avoided by accurate composition. My classes in the evening were fully as pleasant as usual. In explaining to my young class the first three verses of the 16th of John, and to the more advanced one the subject of divine providence from the catechism, I felt more than usually my faith realizing the truth, and in particular experienced something like freedom in discoursing of the love of Christ and the freeness of the gospel, the subjects which I think I am least of all acquainted with, but which it is most important to understand exactly, and discourse on with fulness and affection. I speak of knowing something of the love of Christ; where is that knowledge now?—now, when my soul seems to sink

back into unbelief and carnal ease? Oh Holy Spirit, who dwellest in me, if indeed I am a child of God, awaken my soul, and keep thou it awake! Manifest the Lord Jesus Christ within me, and grant that his love may continually constrain me to live henceforth no *more* to myself but to Him who died for me, and rose again. Amen.

“*October 25th.* (Glasgow sacrament and fast-day.)—Since last date I have had considerable varieties of outward circumstances and of inward spiritual experience. The dealings of the Lord’s providence have been uniformly prosperous, and demand the most fervent and unceasing gratitude, which, alas! I have not given, and cannot give, till I receive it of his infinite and sovereign grace. I have few remarkable discoveries by the Spirit, either of myself or of ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,’ but I think I have still had some advancement, displaying itself in a more staid waiting upon God, and finding the mysteries of the gospel more natural to my soul in worship, and in teaching my classes. To-day I have been in some degree waiting for the manifestations of God, but with little enlargement of spirit in prayer, either for myself or others. At worship I was enabled to speak more fully, boldly, and sweetly for the Lord than usual; but where again is that experience now? It is gone! Alas! the fogs of unbelief and carnal affection seem to be gendered almost by the beams of divine glory coming into contact with the marshy putrid soil of corrupted nature. That which is born of the flesh *is flesh*, that alone which is born of the Spirit is spirit. I am dependent for *every acting* of gracious affection on the power of the Spirit, as well as for the first production of the new nature. How sovereign then, and uncaused by anything in me, is the ineffably gracious and blessed love of the Godhead! My classes appear (especially the young women’s) to be in rather a hopeful state, but ah! where is my travailing in birth till Christ be formed in them? Grant me this, O Lord, and then bestow a blessing above all that I can ask or think, to the praise of the glory of thy grace in Jesus the beloved. Amen.”

Thus was he passing more and more within the deep shadow of that great work to which he had devoted his life, and the commencement of which was now so nearly approaching. How solemnly that shadow fell upon him may be partly gathered from an incident which was related to me recently by one who of all others knew him the earliest and the best. She had gone in to Glasgow, unknown to him, on some domestic errand, and was passing through the narrow covered street called the Argyle Arcade, when she saw him turn the corner in front, and advance slowly towards her from the opposite direction as in deep reverie. Though she went up straight to him, he was quite unconscious of her presence, and started, when addressed, as from a dream. “O mother,” said he with deep emotion, “I did not see you: for when walking along Argyle Street just now, I was so overcome with the sight of the countless crowds of immortal beings eagerly hasting hither and thither, but all posting onwards towards the eternal world, that I could bear it no longer, and turned in here to seek relief in quiet thought” The great deep had been stirred up once more, but by a mightier and more sacred impulse than in former days.

He was licensed to preach the gospel by the presbytery of Glasgow on the 27th day of March, 1839.