

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

A FEW REMINISCENCES OF W. C. BURNS.

BY REV. DR. BURNS, HALIFAX.

When Mr. Burns was a student in Glasgow University he used often to visit us, but of these visits I have no distinct recollection. When I went myself to college, in Nov. 1840, his memory was fresh and fragrant there, especially in the Students' Missionary Society, which I joined at the start, and of which he was a prominent member. My first definite remembrances of him date from July, 1839. On the 18th of that month he came to Paisley to attend the funeral of Mr. George Moody, who was a writer there, and who had been married some years previously to my cousin Margaret, a lovely Christian woman, eldest daughter of my uncle William, the pastor of Kilsyth. Mr. Moody was brother to the well-known Rev. Dr. Moody Stuart of Edinburgh, and his only son, the Rev. Andrew Moody, is the devoted McCheyne-like missionary of the Free Church to the Jews, formerly of Prague, now of Pesth. One of the first books I ever had presented to me bears the imprimatur of George Moody in 1834. He was an Israelite indeed. At his grave cousin William received a fresh baptism which prepared him for the Pentecostal scenes through which he was to pass during the weeks that followed. Because of this many were to realize the truth of the saying: "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." His own account of it is as follows:

"I was to have preached on the evening of the fast-day at Kilsyth, July 18th, but the burial of my dear brother-in-law, George Moody, at Paisley, was fixed for that day, and I was of course obliged to be present thereat. His death was accompanied with a blessing from Jehovah to my soul. I never enjoyed, I think, sweeter realizations of the glory and love of Jesus, and of the certainty and blessedness of His eternal kingdom, than when at Paisley on this solemn occasion. The beautifully consistent and holy walk of our dear departed brother, with the sweet divine serenity that marked the closing scene of his life, made his death very affecting and eminently fitted to draw away the heart of the believer after him to Jesus in the heavenly glory. This was its effect on my soul through the Lord's power. On the way to the grave I wept with joy, and could have praised the Lord aloud for His love in allowing me to assist in carrying to the bed of rest a member of His 'own body,' of His flesh and of His bones," and when I looked for the last time on the confined body in its narrow, low, solitary, cold resting-place, I had a glorious anticipation of the second coming of the Lord, when He would Himself raise up in glory everlasting that dear body which He had appointed us to bury in its corruption and decay."—(Life, page 89)

On the Saturday following (the 20th) he preached at Barton, on Ps. cxxx. 3, in a manner that so impressed my father, who was uncle's chief assistant at that communion, that he insisted on William taking the Sabbath evening service. "My uncle, Dr. Burns of Paisley," writes he, "seemed to feel that the Lord was with me, and kindly asked me to take his place at Kilsyth on Sabbath evening, leaving him to fill mine on Monday forenoon. He spoke also, I remember, on the point of its not being my duty to go abroad, as I was on the eve of doing, but that I should be a home missionary in Scotland. I myself did not speculate anxiously about the future, but desired to be an instrument of advancing His work at the present time." This was the commencement of the great revivals of '39, which delayed for some eight years his carrying out his cherished idea of going as a missionary to the heathen. My father preached on the Monday evening on Isa. lii. 1, William on the Tuesday evening, the 23rd, on Ps. cx. 3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power"—one of his memorable topics. This last was a scene never to be forgotten. All through the week there were meetings. On the Sabbath following, the 28th, it was my high privilege to be present. A mere boy, I had come by invitation of uncle and aunt to spend part of my summer vacation with them. Little thought I of the scenes through which I was to pass—which can never be effaced from my memory. Uncle's text in the parish church that Sabbath morning was Heb. iv. 16, "Let us therefore come boldly."

The afternoon service was at three, in the old churchyard which was close to the manse, but about three-quarters of a mile from the church. Beneath the many green mounds with which that time-honoured graveyard was dotted slumbered the dust of many generations.

The year before, August 1838, uncle had had a

similar Sabbath afternoon gathering in that quiet sleeping place, where he stood on Mr. Robe's grave, his predecessor of nearly a century before, who had been honoured with revival trophies in Whitefield's time. The good pastor of Kilsyth made the tombstone of his revered predecessor "cry out," while he being dead did yet speak through the words engraven in Hebrew characters on that stone (Isalah xxvi. 19), which were chosen for a text that day, "Thy dead men shall live; together with My dead body shall they arise," etc. These striking words, spoken from and amid such solemn surroundings, were as "life from the dead" to many.

Eleven months thereafter I was one of the four thousand who hung on William's lips, which were touched with a live coal that day, as he preached in the same spot from Rom. viii. 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation." The pulpit from which he preached in the old village kirkyard had been used by my father and his brothers when they were boys—trying their 'prentice hand at their great life work in the antique God's house at D'oness. It broke down under the pressure of those exciting scenes. But my cousin's preaching that day was calm, clear, commanding. He came "to the grips" with God and men. Therefore had he power with both, and prevailed. The service proper lasted two hours. During it I observed tears silently stealing down the cheeks of several. But there was no excitement. The benediction was pronounced at five, but over a thousand remained, and singing, with prayers and brief addresses, continued till eight. Even then, they were loath to leave. I can never forget William's going off to the manse, pressed on by an eager crowd who were unwilling to let him go, and lifting up his hands in adoring wonder and gratitude, while his mother stood at the door, her face all aglow, her arms extended in joyous welcome, their hearts burning within them. Dear old aunt! Though detained in the wilderness ten years after her son, till she was over ninety years old, he has greeted her again at the door of his Father's house on high. What a meeting that! in presence of Him who said, "Mother, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother."

On Monday morning, at seven o'clock, two or three hundred had gathered at the church in solemn silence, when uncle (who had been arrested by the piercing cries of an old woman, on the way, and turned aside to counsel and comfort her) appeared, and expounded Song ii. 10-14. All through that day, and many days, vestry and session, house and manse were filled with anxious inquirers.

The church bell rang at half-past six, but the place was "too strait" for the gathering crowd, and they adjourned to the market square, where Mr. (now Dr.) Somerville of Anderston, Glasgow, preached a thrilling sermon from John xvi. 14, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine and shall shew it unto you." I stood on the market-house stair near the preacher. What a scene it was! And there were many such in those days. The crowd so compact as to form a living pavement, the sea of upturned faces, now sparkling under the gleams of the Sun of Righteousness, (who rose with healing under His wings), then surging under the swell of deep emotion, for the windows of heaven were opened and the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

On Tuesday, the 30th, we met in the church at eleven, when Mr. Somerville again preached to a crowded audience. He was then a raven-haired young man, full of deep fervour and tender feeling. When at College I attended him two or three sessions in the afternoons, for another uncle (Ilay) was one of his elders. Good old Thomas Brown, of blessed memory, Dr. Chalmers' successor in St. John's, I attended in the forenoon, with his excellent assistant, William Grant, afterwards of Ayr. The meetings at Kilsyth continued every day for a couple of months, and with intensified interest. My stay was only for about a couple of weeks; but they can never fade from my mind. Boy, though I was, I was deeply impressed with cousin William's holiness and zeal, while his love to the Saviour and souls abounded yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.

The strain upon him was enough to break down any ordinary man, but his voice then could almost rival the thunder peal, and his muscular strength was remarkable. He liked to relax himself by practising gymnastics, walking and leaping, while praising God. I remember his catching me up in his arms and tossing

me over his head; and, on another occasion, crying, "Mother, stand out of the way," while, with a bound, he vaulted over a gate.

In September a special communion season was held, attended by ten or twelve thousand, in whose services Dr. Malan, of Geneva, Principal Cunningham, Charles Brown, Macnaughton, Somerville, and over a dozen others took part, besides my uncle and cousin—a season much to be remembered. All through this great revival, and others throughout Scotland growing out of it, William Burns was recognized as the leading instrument. After leaving Kilsyth he returned to St. Peter's, Dundee, where he was supplying McCheyne's pulpit, during his absence on the mission of inquiry in the Holy Land. I may note that the handsome gift of valuable books donated to him in acknowledgment of his services in Dundee, together with the greater part of his library, including his numerous prizes, form an important part of the large and well selected library of our Halifax College. From 1839 to 1841 he laboured principally in Dundee, St. Andrew's, Perth, Aberdeen and the Highlands. From 1841 to 1844 he laboured chiefly in Newcastle, Edinburgh and Dublin. During these years he occasionally visited Paisley, preaching much in the open air. I recall his appearance beneath the arch of the bridge at the railway station, near the county buildings, and the open space allotted to the "shows" at the fair time—lifting up his voice like a trumpet.

My father had repeatedly spoken to him about going to Canada, and friends, especially in Montreal, had expressed a strong desire for a visit. When my father came over as deputy from the Free Church, one of the first questions put to him was, "Have you brought your nephew with you." On his return, in June, 1844, father found the proposal had been favourably made to William by the Colonial Committee. My father at once clinched it, and he consented. The excellent firm of James R. Orr & Co. offered him a free passage out and back. He sailed from Greenock for Montreal in the brig "Mary," on the 10th August, reaching Montreal on Thursday, 26th September, 1844. The tenth chapter of his invaluable life, embracing thirty pages, written by my father shortly before his death, gives a very graphic narrative of his two years' sojourn in Canada. Our family crossed the Atlantic some eight months after William, leaving Greenock on the first trip of the good ship "Erramanga" (Captain Kelso), of the same firm, on the 29th March, and reaching Montreal on the 12th of May. One of the first to hail us on our arrival was our good cousin, with whom afterwards I had repeated opportunities of meeting. Wherever he went he left "foot-prints." In many parts of the backwoods, eyes will yet fill, and hearts heave, and voices become solemn and tender, when his name is spoken. He had been supplying for a season in the old wooden Tabernacle which preceded the erection of Cote street Church, succeeded by Dr. John Bonar, and Somerville, and Arnot, and a host of choice spirits, with whom that congregation was favoured prior to obtaining a settled minister. William gave two or three months to Kingston, ministering principally to the congregation over whom, a year and a half after, I was settled for eight years. They met in the large hall of the city buildings. I found many blessed memories of him there. One scene is never forgotten. Dr. Lachlin Taylor of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, my faithful friend of over thirty years' standing, has told me of it more than once. When a great ball was to be held in the city hall (the large room at the other end of the building) and it was feared a good many of our people might attend, the faithful evangelist held a meeting in the room near by, the solemnity of which was overpowering, though he did little else than pray and read in his inimitably solemn tones the record of Belsazzar's feast. It spoiled the ball, and made many afterwards "join trembling with their mirth."

A meeting with the students of Knox College, in our house in Toronto, ranks also among my *memorabilia*. What burning earnestness, what a sense of the awful responsibilities of the ministry, combined with much practicalness and good sense, some of my old fellow-students will recall! During May, 1846, I paid my first visit to London and the west, sojourning under the hospitable roof of John Fraser, Esq., then manager of the Montreal Bank there (father of Dr. Donald Fraser, of London, Eng.), one of the noblest men I ever knew. It was worth going to London to see his stately form, his beaming, benevolent face, and to hear