

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Paul's request to Timothy

“Bring the books ...”

The Pastor's Letter (April 1973)

Dear Friends,

Let me bring a concern to your attention. The mass media, television, radio; the popular press has developed an insatiable appetite for material. Almost anything, or any subject, can be taken and either blown up or whittled down into media fodder: anything to fill up the allocated programme time, or columns' space. Now, religious – even Christian – things have not escaped this devouring animal, and the great danger for the people of God lies in this direction – that many of the impressions which they gain on certain



Christian subjects will be **gained only in this way**. In other words, the only knowledge – or main source of knowledge – on some aspect of Christian things will come from the productions of carnal minds absolutely unable and unwilling to form a right estimation of the subject that they have taken in hand to deal with. We shudder to think of some of the warped impressions that will be left in some Christian's mind.

The whole thing, of course, stands related to a far more serious aspect of modern-day Christianity, and that is the sad decline in the reading of Christian books among the Lord's people. Where some prior knowledge of a subject has been obtained from a sympathetic and truly Christian source, the person is buttressed to one degree or another against the assessments and conclusions of unregenerate minds. But, the heart and mind with no prior knowledge whatsoever is like a well-ploughed field just ready to receive the seeds of doubt and misrepresentation.

Without a doubt, the greatest gift that our Lord ever deigned to give to His church, humanly speaking, was the gift of books. It was

no accident, but absolutely in the providential will of a sovereign God, that the greatest turning of the church of God from the days of the apostles should come when the Lord in His mercy had granted the printing press to men. We must never lose sight of the fact that God Himself through the Holy Spirit deigned to be an Author and grant us the word of life. And time would not permit to tell of how He has, again and again, been pleased to use the written word for the glory of His name in the earth.

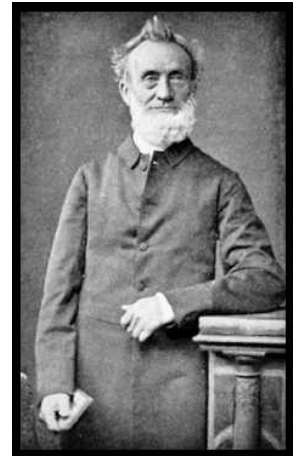
When Christ gave “gifts” to His church, we are told, He gave some “pastors and teachers.” In His abundant goodness, we today have the fruits of the labours of many of these mighty teachers of a past day in the writings that came from their hands and have been given down to us. To neglect or despise these is, surely, to neglect and despise the “gifts” that Christ obtained for His church at the Ascension. They were not only given for their own day, but for the proof of this has been seen time and time again throughout the history of the church, “they being dead, **yet speak.**”

The great Richard Baxter buys Richard Sibbes’ Bruised Reed from an old peddler who called at his home one day when he was just a young boy of fifteen, and through the reading of it, he tells us, he got “a livelier apprehension of the mystery of redemption.” There then followed, in later years, Baxter’s own famous “Call to the Unconverted” which was used of the Lord to bring a legion of souls into the place of salvation. George Whitefield could call Henry Scougal’s Life of God in the Soul of Man, “that excellent treatise;” “I never knew what true religion was,” he tells us, “until God sent me that excellent treatise.” Scougal died in his twenty-eight year and produced little more than that one work, but we see how the Lord gave him a multitude of spiritual “grandchildren” through his son in the faith who became one of the mightiest preachers that the church has ever seen.

George Muller of Bristol – the father of the fatherless – traces the three distinct developments in his Christian life to the reading of three biographies of the saints of the past: Franke’s account of his life

that led to the beginning of the orphan work; Newton's life that led him to produce his Narratives; and Whitefield's life that taught him how to read the Word of God on his knees – to this practice he attributed his continuance in intercession.

The account is endless, but the principal is clear. That desire of Paul's should belong to us all – “Bring the books ...”



Yours
W. J. Seaton



Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 51 (Part 1)

Title – “A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone into Bathsheba.” When the divine message had aroused David's dormant conscience and made him see the greatness of his guilt, he wrote this psalm. He had forgotten his psalmody while he was indulging his flesh, but he returned to his harp when his spiritual nature was awakened, and he poured out his song to the accompaniment of sighs and tears.

P. A. Spurgeon

Verse 1 “Have mercy upon me, O God ...” William Carey, during a time of severe illness, was asked, “If this illness should prove fatal, what passage would you select for your funeral sermon?” “Oh,” he replied, “I feel that such a poor sinful creature as I, is unworthy to have anything said about him; but if a funeral sermon should be

preached let it be from the fifty-first psalm, the first verse: ‘Have mercy upon me, O God ...’”

Verse 1 “... blot out my transgressions.” There is reference here to an indictment: the psalmist knows what it contains; he pleads guilty, but begs that the writing may be defaced; that a proper fluid may be applied to the parchment to discharge the ink, that no record of it may ever appear against him. And this, only the mercy, lovingkindness, and tender compassions of the Lord can do.

Adam Clarke

Verse 3 “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.” “My sin,” says David; he owns it, and confesses it to be his own. Here is man’s *natural* wealth, for what can we call our own apart from our sin? Our food and raiment, and all the necessities of life, are only borrowed. We came hungry and naked into the world, we brought none of these with us, and we deserved none of them here. But our sin came with us, as David later confesses: - “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ...”

Samuel Raje

Verse 4. “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned ...” This is that Godly sorrow which leads a man to eternal life; and this sorrow is wrought in a man by the Holy Spirit of God, so that he mourns for sin because it has displeased God. And suppose that man had neither a heaven to lose, nor a hell to gain; yet he is sorrowful and sad of heart because he has grieved God.

John Welch

Verse 4 “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned ...” “Here, here am I that did it,” says David; “whose sheep-hook thou hast changed for a sceptre, whose sheep for thine own people Israel, upon whose head Thou hast set a crown of gold; I to whom God committed the care of others’ souls, to guide them by His word, to direct them by good counsel, to allure them by His gracious promises, and terrify them by His threatening; I, who both as prophet and king should have been an example of holiness and righteousness to all Israel; to me,

Nathan has said, ‘Thou art the man’ in just accusation and now I must reply, ‘**I am** the man’ in humble confession.”

Adapted from Samuel Page

Verse 5 “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ...” It is not enough for him to confess that the water is filthy at the pool; he goes back to the source, and confesses that the whole river is polluted up to its head. The source is unclean; the very spring pours forth foul waters.

Thomas Alexander

Verse 6 “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts ...” It is one thing to be wise-headed and wise-tongued, but another to be wise-hearted. Foolish men are like Ephraim, “a silly dove without heart.” They have head enough, but not heart enough. A new head and an old heart, a full head and an empty heart, an illuminated head and a dark heart; he that trusts in such a condition is a fool and a double fool.

John Murcot

Verse 7 “Purge me with hyssop ...” The psalmist alludes to the purification from leprosy (Lev. 14:52), or from the touch of a dead body (Num 19:19). Both of these purifications were to be done by the sprinkling of water and hyssop.

Samuel Chandler

Verse 7 ““Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Scarcely does Holy Scripture contain a verse more full of faith than this. Considering the nature of a verse more full of faith than this. Considering the nature of the sin, and the deep sense of the psalmist had of it, it is a glorious faith to be able to see in the blood all-sufficient merit to entirely purge it away. O that some reader may now take heart, even now while smarting under sin, to rely thus confidently on the finished work of Calvary, and the infinite mercy there revealed.

C. H. Spurgeon

The Greatest Sight of All

By
John (Rabbi) Duncan



.....

It is a great thing to be the sons of God now; “but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Faith’s view of Christ is transforming, it is glorifying. But it is not so transforming, not so glorifying, as the vision of immediate presence. “Hence,” says the apostle, “we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight ...” Faith is an imperfect medium of communion with Christ.

It is a **true** medium, the only medium we have here on earth. O! What a glorious medium of communion with Christ faith is! And yet it is an imperfect medium. “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory” – in the same place, and eye to eye, **not by report**. It is on report that faith goes – we have nothing for it but report.

It is **faith** – and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” It is a solid and substantial report, it is true, it is the testimony of God who cannot lie; but, it is report, it is testimony. **But He shall be seen.** “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty;” thou shalt behold Him, not with faith’s dim vision. I say faith’s **dim** vision, taking faith at its brightest. But faith at its brightest is dim compared to sight – “We walk by faith, not by sight.” What we have **heard**, we shall **see**; what we have heard and **believed**, we shall yet see. “Said I not unto thee, that if thou shouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” – “if thou wilt **believe**, thou shalt **see.**” “Father, I will

that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Ah! Can we form little conception of **sinlessness** “There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.” Oh! Surely if the saints could quarrel with the way of salvation – if they could quarrel, it would be about this – that there is no sinlessness in the present life. But it is God’s plan. But oh! To be out of the inbeing of sin! To be out of the effects of sin! To be out of this mortal body, and mortality swallowed up of life! Being where Christ is, and beholding His glory! Oh! Is it miserably little that I know of Jesus Christ – miserably little; but with this, I sum up all the brightness of the beatific glory – the being with Christ where He is, and beholding His glory. Ah yes!



William Chalmers Burns

The Christian life of William Chalmers Burns divides itself very abruptly into two distinct periods. For the first fifteen years of his converted life, William Burns was greatly and mightily used of the Lord in the promotion of religious revivals, especially at his home town of Kilsyth and at Dundee (in the church of Robert Murray McCheyne,) and in many other parts of the country, as well.

From the midst of all this labour in these islands the Lord, in His unexplainable ways at times, removed this man who had been used to

call hundreds into a saving knowledge of Christ, and placed him thousands of miles away in the, then very much unknown and unexplored, great land of China, where he was to labour in something like total obscurity for the next twenty years or so.

This fact cast an almost mysterious lustre around the shoulders of William Burns, and leaves us with two very distinct and contrasting impressions of the Minister/missionary's life. In the first place, we see him as the eloquent and fervent preacher of God's Word in the midst of the reviving church in Scotland during the first half of the nineteenth century; for the last twenty years of his life he has become that strange Chinese figure, having adopted the dress and personal appearance of the teeming multitudes of that ancient civilization in an effort to gain closer contact with them in order to bring them the Word of Life. Yet, God was greatly glorified in the life of William Burns – whether in the carved and polished pulpits of the churches in Scotland, or in the Chinese junks that lay alongside the river banks in that far-away and distant land.



The reason for all that is this: Burns had long-since settled in his heart and mind that God was to be glorified in **all** the earth; and so, wherever the Lord would lead him, there he would gladly follow with that great aim in view. “Take care of His cause,” he was exhorted by the venerable Rabbi Duncan, under whose ministry he grew and developed in the Milton Street church in Glasgow, “Take care of His cause, and He will take care of your interests; look after His glory, and He will look after your comforts.” The word never left William Burns’ heart, and he could as gladly turn to “the land of Sinim” when the time came, as he had turned to his own realm of Scotland those fifteen years before.

But, to begin at the beginning! William Burns was born in the Manse at Duns in Angus in the year 1815. His father was minister in that place and one of the old school of evangelicals which was a fairly rare

breed at that particular time. Burns was reared up under the sound of the doctrines of God's free grace to sinners, for, both in the Church of which he was minister and in his own home, the older Burns loved to set forth the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. Even in the midst of such an environment, however, the young William appeared little influenced and when the family reading was in progress was most conspicuous by his absence.

Religious books held no attraction for him, and the Pilgrim's Progress alone seems to have caught and held his imagination at this period in his life. In the providence of the Lord, it was this very book that was to be so greatly used by Burns in China when he was enabled to interpret its message into the language and thought-forms of the Chinese people. In these early days, however, the young Burns had no thought whatsoever of his life's work for God in such a barren and remote part of the world – nor, indeed, had he any thought even of God Himself. He had firmly set his eye on what he believed to be more verdant pastures, and these he laboured to enter. An uncle of the family had carved out an extremely comfortable living for himself by entering the Law profession, and young William consistently reasoned with himself – Lawyers have lots of money and live in grand houses, therefore, seeing that I want to have lots of money and live in a grand house, I will become a Lawyer! With this aim in view he left the Manse – now at Kilsyth – and entered into what he imagined his life's career was going to be in Edinburgh. “We mourn over him as one bound for the world,” his sister wrote. But, into the world he went, for it was only the world he sought.

Once settled in the fashionable society of his new life, Burns began to draw sharp contrasts between it and the fixed and solid standards that he had known “from his youth up.” His worldly resolutions and determinations began to waver somewhat, and one or two influences were brought to bear on his mind about this time. A letter from his sisters at home in which they referred to the family as pilgrims bound for eternity and leaving him behind, proved to be one of the first barbs to his conscience. Although his feelings were little more than natural at the idea of parting eternally with those that he loved, nevertheless,

his eyes were taken momentarily off the things of the world and on to the things of eternity; “I could not think of my Christian parents, and my Godly home with all its sweet and solemn privileges, without an awful conflict of soul at the thought of parting with them for ever. **I could think of parting with Christ**, for I knew Him not, but to part with them was too much for me to bear.”

At this point, a second influence was brought to bear. Before leaving home, his father had given him a copy of Pike’s Early Piety, and to this he now turned. “While gazing on a solemn passage in it,” he tells us, “my inmost soul was pierced as with a dart. God had apprehended me,” he goes on, “I felt the conviction of my lost estate rushing through me with resistless power; I left the room, and retired to a bedroom, there to pour out my heart for the first time with many tears in a genuine heart-rending cry for mercy.” His conclusions with regards to his soul and his future quickly follow; “From the first moment of this wonderful experience,” he records, “I had the inspiring hope of being saved by a sovereign and infinitely gracious God; and in the same instant almost, I felt that I must leave my present occupation and devote myself to Jesus in the ministry of the glorious gospel by which I had been saved.”

His sister takes up the narrative at this point, how he suddenly and unexpectedly walked into the old manse at Kilsyth; “Oh, Willie,” exclaimed his mother, “where have you come from?” His answer was terse and to the point; “From Edinburgh,” he replied. “How did you get here?” “I walked.” (This was a distance of 36 miles.) “There was then a silence,” his sister tells us, “and standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, he said, ‘what would you think, mother, if I should be a minister after all?’ His countenance showed that he was speaking in earnest, and he then told openly how the Lord had arrested him, and that he had no rest in his spirit till he should come home and obtain his parents’ consent to relinquish the law and give himself to the service of Jesus in the ministry of the gospel.”

We can imagine that no consent was more gladly given, and in process of time, we find William Burns enrolled as a Divinity student

at Glasgow. The most popular University for Divinity at this time was Edinburgh where the great Thomas Chalmers was at his zenith. Burns' enrolment at Glasgow takes on a distinctively providential flavour, for it was here that he came under the influence of Rabbi Duncan – a man burning with zeal for the missionary work of the church, and who, in turn, fired the hearts of the young men under him. Burns recalls the Rabbi's ministry, "As if every Sabbath spent in Milton Church had been a day on Patmos, and every sermon as the opening of the gates of heaven." Before he had left Glasgow, William Burns had already decided that he would seek the glory of the Lord far beyond his native shores. This was, indeed, to be the case, but he was to learn – as many before and since have had to do – that the Lord's ways can be slow in maturing in our estimation of time.

It was in the same year that Burns was licensed to preach – 1839 – that Robert Murray McCheyne received an invitation to join the party



bound for Palestine to explore the possibility of a mission work among the Jews. A substitute preacher was required for McCheyne's congregation at St. Peter's in Dundee during his absence, and in the all-sovereign purposes of God, William Burns was elected to fill the vacancy.

McCheyne's letter to him at this time is characteristic of the saintly pastor; "You are given in answer to prayer," he wrote, "may you be a thousand times more blessed among my people

than I have ever been." That heart's desire and prayer was soon to be answered; McCheyne had sown the seed of the Word faithfully, and soon, both sower and reaper would rejoice together. Almost from the first, the sheaves began to be gathered in. Burns then received a call from the Mission board to go to Poona in India. He was undecided on account of the way that the Lord had apparently begun to send a time of reviving upon His church at home, and he returned to his old home at Kilsyth to seek the way of the Lord more perfectly. Kilsyth was a

village that was no stranger to the reviving grace of God, and in the times of Whitefield, while under the ministry of James Robe, the place had become as “a well of living waters.”

William Burns’ Godly old father remembered such days, and longed for them in the earth again, and it was his custom to take some of his congregation and gather for prayer in those very spots that the Lord had visited in a bye-gone age. Surely, neither he himself, or any member of that Kilsyth church, could ever have imagined that the instrument in the hand of the Lord for the glorious revival among them would be that runagate youth who had left the old manse not many years before with his dreams of wealth and earthly prosperity. But, so it was to be!

Burns’ own account is the best commentary on those memorable days in July 1839. He had preached at the Communion service on the Lord’s Day with very little visible effect, but it was during the service of the Tuesday morning following that the Lord began to speak with a voice to wake the dead. “When I entered the pulpit,” Burns tells us, “I saw before me an immense multitude from the town and neighbourhood filling the seats, stairs, passages, and porches ... I began, I think, by singing Psalm 102, and was affected deeply when in reading it I came to these lines:

‘Her time for favour which was set,
Behold, is now come to an end.’

That word ‘**Now**’ touched my heart as with Divine power, and encouraged the sweet hope that the set time was really **now** at hand.” He preached from the words, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power,” and, says he, “during the whole of the time that I was speaking, the people listened with the most riveted and solemn attention, and with many silent tears and inward groanings of the spirit: **but**,” he goes on, “at last their feelings became too strong for all ordinary restraints, and broke forth simultaneously in weeping and wailing, tears and groans intermingled with shouts of joy and praise from some of the people of God.”

God had answered Burns' present indecision with regards to his place of labour in a most remarkable way, and his return to Dundee only served to add weight to the answer. What had earlier begun as a trickle of blessing in St. Peter's now enlarged into a flood, and as McCheyne returned from the Holy Land to take up the work in Dundee once more, there were many who sought the ministry of the man whom God had so manifestly laid His hand upon.

Again, Burns thought it fitting to consider his present sphere of service, but his conclusion soon grew – “It is a fearful sin to be going through the world with a light kindled by the Holy Ghost to guide sinners to Christ, and yet, carry this as a dark lantern that cannot benefit any one ...” The story of his life thereafter is one of diligent labour for the Lord, of oppositions and beatings, and stonings as he preached in the open air; of crowded churches and outpourings of the Holy Spirit of God; of the establishing of the work of grace in many hearts.

A new day was about to dawn among the churches of Scotland; the Disruption of 1843 now necessitated consolidation and pastoral work, and Burns believed that the time to seek out the heathen in his strong crafts in the China waterways had come.

In November 1847, William Burns arrived in the harbour of Hong Kong to begin a new life, unknown and unsung, even in the Church of Christ.



BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

I wonder how many of you know where you would find Formosa on the Map? Yes, that's right; it's an island separated from the mainland of China by the Strait of Formosa. Today it is called Taiwan.



To this lovely island there once came a young Chinese governor named Gohu, to be their leader. When he saw how cruel and wild these people were, and how they went on head-hunting raids and offered human sacrifices to their gods, he became very sad.

After some time he called them all together one day, and begged them to give up these terrible practices, and he told them of his plans for living together in peace. They agreed to try out his plans, and for some time peace and happiness reigned, and the boys and girls of the island played without fear. As this continued Gohu was very pleased and happy.

Then trouble came in the form of a terrible drought. At once they began to think that their heathen gods were angry. The priests went about the people saying that a human sacrifice would be necessary, and all the mothers and fathers, and boys and girls became very afraid that their home would be chosen for a suitable sacrifice. Gohu loved his people, especially the children, and he could not bear

that one of them would be cruelly killed. So as the priests demanded a sacrifice, he said to them: "Let it be so. Tomorrow morning there will come from the forest a man wearing a long red cloak and hood. Strike him and offer him as your sacrifice". Next morning, as Gohu had said, a man wearing a long cloak and hood walked out from the trees. As he fell to the ground with a knife stuck in his heart, his hood fell off! It was none other than their beloved leader, Gohu.

The people never forgot the happenings of that day, and it turned out to be the very last human sacrifice in the island of Formosa. Gohu bravely and willingly died for his people who loved him. But boys and girls, just think, Jesus died on Calvary for those who hated him. The Bible tells us "While we were yet in our sin, Christ, (that is Jesus) died for us". How great His love must have been.

Trust Jesus, boys and girls, and He will save you.

Love
Mrs Seaton