TRUE STORIES OF DURHAM PIT-LIFE

BY

GEORGE PARKINSON

Of Sherburn

WITH INTRODUCTIONS

BY

SIR W. H. STEPHENSON, D.C.L.

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AND

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Mr. George Parkinson.

INTRODUCTIONS

I.

Lord Mayor's Chamber,
Town Hall,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
27th November, 1911.

MY DEAR MR. PAGE,

I am very pleased to be assured that our valued friend, Mr. George Parkinson, has consented to the publication of his Reminiscences of Methodism. It would have been a great disappointment, and a loss to the Wesleyan community, if he had been permitted to pass away without his experience being put in a convenient and permanent form for the use and profit of those who may succeed him.

His long and strenuous life has been full of active and successful service for Christ and His Church, and the record of what he has been able to accomplish, especially among the young, will be an incentive to all to follow his example and to engage heartily in all that concerns and promotes the moral and spiritual uplifting of the community.

As a lover of the Sunday school, and one who for more than half-a-century has devoted his energies to that undertaking, it may be remarked that greatly exceeding a generation of children has passed through

his hands, many of them to do well, and a large number of them to serve their day and generation and honour God by their consistent and useful lives. In fact, only eternity will reveal the gracious results which have accrued from the disinterested and self-sacrificing labours of Mr. Parkinson.

I much regret that the constant claims upon my time, both for public and other matters, preclude a fuller statement. I may say that, notwithstanding our friend's advanced years, I still hope that in the evening of life he may yet have further opportunity of serving the Church he loves so well, and I may further add that he lives in the esteem and goodwill of all who have had the pleasure and honour of his acquaintance.

Yours faithfully,

WM. H. STEPHENSON,
Lord Mayor.

II.

FOR more than forty years I have been proud to number George Parkinson among my most valued friends, and now gladly accede to his request that I should write this brief Introduction.

I have long been of opinion that it is incumbent upon men who have had unique experiences in Christian work to leave some record behind them. For twenty years or more Mr. Parkinson was urged by his friends to commit to writing some of his more striking reminiscences and experiences. This book is the result, and I, for one, am devoutly thankful that such episodes as are here recorded have been saved from oblivion.

George Parkinson's life and labours present a fine example of what Methodism can make of a man born in very humble circumstances. He was gifted with superior natural endowments; and in spite of defective education, and the disadvantage of having to begin work in the pit at a tender age, he has been able, by dint of persistent industry, to accomplish a splendid work for God and humanity. He has had a 'good innings,' and we thank God for the work His servant has accomplished.

George Parkinson's life-work may be best chronicled under these six headings:

1. *His week-night Bible-class for young men.* This was maintained for over sixty years. This class may be described as the passion of his life; it proved a veritable nursery of Christian workers, including local preachers, ministers, and at least one missionary. Eternity alone will reveal its far-reaching results.

2. *His work as a lay preacher.* Few of the local preachers of Methodism have had a career more fruitful in blessing. For fifty years his services were in constant demand for Sunday-school anniversaries Throughout the county of Durham his addresses on such occasions are remembered and talked of to this day.

3. *As a Class-leader.* His enthusiasm and success in this work were quite exceptional. He was in truth *the* lay pastor of Sherburn. His sympathy, tact, and common sense eminently fitted him for this important office.

4. As a *counsellor in the church courts.* He took an active interest in the Quarterly Meetings, District Synods, and Annual Conferences of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. In such meetings he was a wise and far-seeing adviser, his long experience in practical church work giving weight to his counsels.

5. *Miners' Permanent Relief Fund.* He took a prominent part in the organization and extension of the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, which has brought untold blessing to the victims of mining accidents and to their relatives.

6. For a period of twenty years his services as *arbitrator* were frequently requisitioned in disputes between miners and their employers. In such disputes both sides confided their interests without reserve to his unbiassed arbitrament.

In sending forth this little volume I confidently anticipate that these true stories—full as they are of vivid descriptions of Durham pit-life, with its humorous and pathetic memories—will find a grateful appreciation in many a miner's home.

Moreover, the style of writing is so clear, easy, and natural that I shall be surprised if the book does not also commend itself to a much wider circle of readers.

T. H. BAINBRIDGE.

FOREWORD

DURING the later years of a long and busy life I have been much pressed by a wide circle of friends to write its story, or at least to outline in personal reminiscences, its varied experiences. My only opportunity, however, for responding to this request now comes amid the growing infirmities of age, compelling my retirement from the work in which I have been happily engaged 'from ruddy youth to hoary age.' After seventy years of joyous toil amidst the community to which I belong, I sit down in the reflective light of eventide, while the undimmed eye of memory ranges over a landscape of over fourscore years. These memories are written without pretension to literary finish, but not without hope that they may be what my friends desire, and that possibly they may be found helpful to others. They have been written with some feeling of certainty that they will at least be read with gratification in the home of many an old Durham miner, not only in this but in other lands, recalling cherished memories and the happy associations of former days. The recollection

of these 'days of auld lang syne' may re-kindle smouldering fires of remembrance, and even a longing for

> The touch of a vanished hand
> And the sound of a voice that is still.

G. PARKINSON.

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CHAPTER I

Early Memories

To readers of these reminiscences who do not know me personally, I may without presumption or needless apology present myself as the son of a Durham miner, born in 1828 in the colliery village of New Lambton, where my father was also born in 1804.

On that level of life, I passed from childhood to manhood through the ordinary curriculum of the northern pitboy's lot. I graduated successively from the starting-point of a doorkeeper in the mine at nine years of age, through all the stages of a miner's toil and its dangers, till at twenty-one years of age I took my degree as a coal-hewer, this being the highest unofficial position attainable at the cost of the hardest form of mining-labour known. Like an apprentice completing his 'time,' so the 'putter,' or conveyer of coal, becoming a hewer, has reached his highest level, and in the old pit phrase, 'He's now a man for hissel'.' He may be only a pitman; but, in taking stock of human nature, men have learned that in the pit, or at the plough, or any other form of honourable labour, 'A man's a man for a' that.'

Now, on that basis of honest toil and nobility of character I have always cherished a pardonable pride

in my parentage. True no family coat-of-arms nor legendary lore from the College of Heralds relieved the monotony of our humble cottage walls. Nothing suggested either a past greatness from which our family had descended, or the loss of lands and titles which were never ours. My father and mother were practical people, living in the present, the joy of their lives being largely found in ministering to the needs of those around them in every possible way. Though they have long passed to rest, they are still remembered with kindly and grateful thoughts in many a humble home.

Passing through the market-place at Durham once, I was accosted by a man who said, 'Excuse me, sir, but I have long wanted a chance to tell you a story which I think will interest you. My mother was left a widow with me, her only child. We lived in a house which stood alone in a field about half-a-mile from your father's house. One very dark night we sat in that lonely cottage, no one near us, no fire nor any coal to make one, and no food. But somehow your father had heard of us, and as we sat weeping in our loneliness, he appeared at the door with a poke of coals and some chips of wood. In a few minutes a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate. Then your mother and your aunt Bessie came with parcels of bread, butter, tea, and sugar, and a bottle of milk as well. The kettle was quickly boiling, tea was prepared, and soon all gloom was gone, as if the change might have been worked by the fairies.'

Then laying his hand on my shoulder, he said in a faltering voice: 'Mr. Parkinson, I've never seen a fire burn as bonny as that did, and I never had a meal like that in my life. Oh! it was grand, sir, it was grand! Then your father came back in the morning, and after making inquiries he went to one of the colliery offices and got me work on the screens at the pit. The man in charge promised to look after me. After asking for a load of coals to be sent to us, your father took me home as happy as a prince, to tell my mother of our future prospects. Aw've been on them screens and about that pit for above thirty years, and for some time now Aw've had charge of the screens and other work.' With tears dropping down his cheek he again shook my hand and exclaimed, 'Oh that neet! Ah'll niver forget that neet!' I went on my way thinking of Tennyson's line, 'Kind hearts are more than coronets,' and again of that sentence greater still, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me.'

My father's fine courage and resourcefulness were exhibited in another incident which took place at Haswell Colliery, where we were then living. The boiler exploded, and it was necessary to draw the men from the pit. The only apparatus available was the 'crab,' a sort of huge drum revolving horizontally, to which a rope was attached, which reached to the shaft bottom. On this was hung the 'corf,' or basket, in which coal was brought up, and in which the men sometimes came to 'bank.' The shaft was 160

fathoms or 960 feet deep. The crab, moved by a horse, was a very slow method of traction, but nothing better could be found.

Some obstruction took place, and the corf, full of men, hung in the shaft for an hour-and-a-half, exposed to the strong downward current of air caused by the ventilating arrangements. By the time the corf again began to ascend all the men were chilled and benumbed. When only a few feet remained to be traversed one of the men fell backwards, and but for the fact that the corf edge held him behind the knees, he would have gone to the bottom of the shaft. His jacket fell over his head and entangled his arms. He could not see, nor could he do anything to help himself. His companions, stiff with cold, could do nothing but shout, 'A man is falling! Stop the crab!' It was stopped, and the men in charge crowded to the shaft mouth to find what could be done. It was 3 a.m. on a dark winter morning, and nothing could be seen. My father instantly threw off his blue jacket and his shoes, and called for two men, each over six feet high and powerful in proportion. 'What are ye gannin to dee, Willie?' was the question. 'Aa's gannin to be let doon there heed first, to get ha'ad of him and fetch him up.' He lay down, and the two strong men seized him by the ankles and lowered him into the abyss as far as they could reach. He felt about for the man's collar, in momentary fear that the slight grip which kept the poor fellow from destruction

might fail and sweep them both away. As soon as he felt that he had a sufficient and safe hold on the collar of the pit jacket, he called out, ' Draw up very slowly.' Inch by inch the corf ascended, and when clear of the edge, the eager hands reached out and drew it to the side of the shaft, where the poor fellow was released from his awful position and my father was again set on his feet. He donned jacket and shoes and went home, not thinking he had done anything out of the common, but taking it all in the day's work. No reporter expatiated in those days on such feats, and no medals were awarded for what was regarded as a man's plain, every-day duty, a thing not to be shirked or neglected, at the peril of bitter self-contempt.

Such was my parentage, and such was the spirit of the home in which my brother and I grew up together for twenty-five years. It is not strange, then, that the memory of that home and parentage is still very warm and very dear to both of us, and still supplies impulse and motive after the greater part of a century has elapsed.

The village in which I was born was a prominent feature of a picturesque landscape lying between the ancient town of Houghton-le-Spring and the Warden Law on the east, and the still more ancient town of Chester-le-Street on the west, with the well-wooded valley of the Wear between. One long row of low-roofed brick cottages, with a few other rows standing apart, formed the street, which faced a meadow

through which ran a clear burn or stream. Some distance down the stream stood an old mill, at the entrance to a series of delightful woods, clothing the steep banks of the burn. In spring multitudes of primroses grew here, and the spot still bears the name of Primrose Hill. Beyond this lay some pleasant lanes, passing near the domains of Lumley and Lambton Castles, with fine woods on either hand; so that even in the life of a pit village, beauty and variety of interest were not lacking.

The miner's lot at that period included very long hours of labour, with very short hours for rest. No standard of age was then fixed for boys entering the pit, but they were sent to work as early as six or seven years of age; not, as is sometimes alleged, from mere heartlessness on the part of the parents, but under the pressure of growing family needs, which was very keenly felt in my early years, owing to the long-continued low rate of wages and the high prices of provisions. Nor was any legal time-limit fixed for their dark and dreary toil, so that, irrespective of age or circumstances, boys were generally called from bed at three o'clock in the morning. Meeting at the pit mouth at four, they descended into the regions of darkness, where for thirteen or fourteen hours a day—and often for more—they abode in gloom, made visible by the feeble flickering light of a small tallow candle, or the still feebler reflection of the wire-shaded Davy lamp. Though sunrise and sunset duly followed in the world they had left behind, no gleam

of daylight nor ray of sunshine illumined their path, save on Sundays, for six months in the year.

Thus the Sunday became the veritable jewel of the week, when the cares and miseries of the work-days vanished from memory, and the joys of family life, of sunlight, and of unwonted ease made a little Paradise. One particular Sunday morning stands out very vividly in my memory. I was then a little over nine years of age, and on the Saturday night, after the six days' rising at three a.m. and returning at six p.m., I sat, tired and weary, drowsily nodding by the fireside, exceedingly comfortable, with my feet on the bright half of a wagon-wheel which served as a fender. On retiring to bed, I was asleep in two or three minutes. About five in the morning I woke, under the impression that I had been called on to go to work; but I could find no pit clothes laid in their usual place before the fire, which was glowing in the grate. I saw no preparations for work going on, and I was just growing peevish when, turning round, I saw my Sunday clothes laid on the chair beside the bed, with my stockings on the top, all in order for putting on. It dawned upon me that the day was Sunday, and with feelings of intense joy and satisfaction, such as no words could express, I sprang back to bed, and again drifted off to sweet and restoring sleep. Years after I told Peter Mackenzie this story, which he introduced into a lecture on the Sabbath, describing the scene, and exclaiming in his own inimitable manner, 'The poor bairn bounced into bed

with a joy that Napoleon never felt at Austerlitz nor Wellington at Waterloo.'

Thus some of the happiest memories of my early days centre round the Sunday. Saturday night, for instance, was a time of preparation. All the week's work was done, and everything connected with it put out of sight. The whole night's rest lasting till daylight on Sunday morning, the one family dinner of the week, the Sunday school and the public services, all combined to create an oasis in the wilderness, filling the atmosphere with welcome fragrance as it drew near. It was literally the day of days, a veritable Elim of wells and palm-trees, with a desert on either side as barren and desolate as Shur or Sinai to the Israelites of old.

In the early years of the eighteenth century the only provision for the religious needs of the coalfields centred in the parish churches, which were very few and far apart. As new collieries were opened, and large populations gathered round them, the existing churches were quite inadequate for the growing necessities of the case. But nothing was done, and vast numbers of people grew up without the humanizing influences of either religion or education, and in consequence were the ready victims of vice in all its forms. The 'Pitman's Pay' gives us a picture of the rough manners, boisterous enjoyments, and hard life of the men of those days.

When the great evangelist of that time came to preach the gospel in the North, he found a virgin soil.

From place to place he travelled to speak to multitudes who knew nothing of their own sinful, lost condition, nor of the means of salvation. Thus, when Methodist societies were formed, the members were in no sense Dissenters; they had nothing to dissent from. Methodism was the only agency that taught them, enlightened them, and fed their hungry souls.

The oldest and most familiar mental photograph in my memory is that of a square, red-tiled brick building at the end of a long row of miners' cottages in my native village. This structure, being somewhat higher than any other building in the place, had a prominence which naturally attracted attention where there was little else to notice. Two large windows in front, and a projecting porch covering the doorway between, marked it out as a special building both in structure and purpose. Though void of ornament and without architectural pretensions, that little unassuming Methodist chapel was the only place of worship, and its Sunday school the only place of education, in the village for more than sixty years of its history. During those years the services held and the lessons taught within those rough brick walls won many souls for Christ, changed many lives and many homes, turning evildoers into workers in the Master's vineyard, and helping to form Christian characters to carry on the work in years to come. Thus the little chapel, with these associations and memories of families and friendships from childhood to old age, became as

sacred and as much revered by the people of the village as St. Paul's Cathedral can be by inhabitants of London or St. Peter's by the citizens of Rome.

The only place for social gatherings or recreation was a public-house, formed by uniting two cottages, which with a fenced cockpit and a quoit ground at the front, and a quiet place for pitch-and-toss just round the corner, provided opportunities for votaries of these sports, which, with the tap-room as their centre, were often accompanied by drunken brawls and fightings, with all the demoralizing influences arising therefrom.

Beside the chapel the nearest places of worship were the church at Houghton-le-Spring, about two miles off to the east, and the more ancient church at Chester-le-Street, three miles away on the west. A chapel-of-ease at Penshaw, two miles-and-a-half in another direction, was the parish church. From none of these, however, was any pastoral visitation conducted, nor were any religious services held for the people of New Lambton, who, like those in many other places, were literally left to sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death.

Yet, just as the people which sat in darkness by way of the sea in Galilee of the Gentiles eighteen hundred years before, saw the great gospel light break on the shores of their lake and chase the darkness from their region, so in the eighteenth century the mining population in the colliery vllages of Durham and Northumberland by way of the Wear and Tyne

saw that same gospel light, 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' breaking on the villages of Low Fell and Tanfield, Horsley and Plessey, Birtley, Biddick, and Penshaw.

At Shiney Row, a village about one-and-a-quarter miles away, the Methodist revival had 'broken out,' and the news spread to all the villages round. In the houses, down the pits, and at the street corners, conversation turned frequently on what was going on at 'Shiney Row.' One man at Lambton determined to see for himself what the strange news meant, for he had heard that some one whom he knew had been 'converted,' and he was determined to see what this converting was like. On the Sunday morning, therefore, he walked to Shiney Row, and on entering the village met two men. To his great surprise, no dogs accompanied them; they were dressed in their better suits, and altogether had the appearance of men bent on important matters. 'W'y, whatten sort o' day had ye yisterda', lads?' he called out to the men. 'Eh, there's a bonny gam' on here,' replied one of them. 'What's the matter noo?' 'The Methodies hes getten in amang huz, and some o' huz hes getten in amang the Methodies. The bowling match didn't come off yesterday, because baith Harry and Tom was convarted last Sunda'. There hesn't been a fight all the week-end.'

The men were on their way to a meeting in some cottage, and they invited their questioner to go with them. In reporting his experiences he said: 'Whe

dis thou think was the preacher, but Jacky Raisbeck fra Lumley? He'd a white 'kucher, and, my sang! he luk'd as good as a parson. He preached about the horrible pit, and, my word! gettin' to bank was a queer job.'

He and his wife asked some of the Shiney Row men to come and hold a prayer-meeting in their house on the next Saturday night. This was the first Methodist service held in the village. People heard the singing, and came to their doors. Then 'Jacky Raisbeck' came and preached. When the place came on to the Sunderland plan none of the dwellers in Lambton had ever seen its name in print, and they flocked to look at the strange sight. The travelling preacher came on the Saturday, and the good wife made a special cake for his delectation. The little table was set in front of the window, covered with a 'harn' tablecloth. Everything, though rough and coarse, was made spotlessly clean. The fireplace, bright with polished fire-irons and a glowing blaze, shone welcome. Behind the door a ladder led to the upper room or loft close to the tiles, which were not hidden by any plaster or wooden ceiling. The flooring boards of the loft were laid loose upon the joists.

The host, sure that the house would be full, took up every third board in the loft, and on the two remaining planks he placed forms, so that those upstairs could hear, though they could not see. Their heads touched the tiles in the roof, and movement was

impossible, they were so closely packed. The ladder by which they climbed up provided seats for others, and the whole house was thus filled with eager hearers.

Then a revival began at Lambton. Many were being saved, and the colliery viewer, Tom Smith, had the good sense to see that the converted men were punctually at the pit on Monday morning instead of lounging at the public-house. He offered to alter Jacob Speed's cottage at the end of the row, so that it could be used as a chapel. The colliery workmen were sent, and part of the needful timber was provided. The roof was raised several feet, partitions removed, and a gallery at each side and at the back was put up; two large windows put in, and the doorway protected by a small porch. Thus the chapel was provided, which, with necessary alterations, has served its purpose to the present day.

Pew rent at the rate of 9*d*. per quarter was charged for seats in the side gallery, the money thus raised being devoted to the provision of paper, pens, and ink for the writing-classes in the Sunday school. Eighteen shillings per quarter was the regular amount thus raised for some time.

The chapel thus created was the centre of almost all extra-domestic life. Its only competitor was the public-house; and gradually, all that made for good living, high character, and even the elements of education, found its home and sphere in the little sanctuary. The work was maintained at the cost of

many sacrifices and much self-denial by the poorly paid pitmen, who found in the Methodist services their consolation amidst hardships and their inspiration and hope for better things to come.

CHAPTER II

First Days Down the Pit

WHAT a day that was *to me!* Although I have never seen it chronicled in Old Moore's Almanack, nor read of it in any book save my father's old red-backed 'memorandum book,' in which he carefully noted matters of family interest and other things worth remembering, yet that day and its doings are so vividly impressed on my memory that what I then saw and felt remains as clear and fresh as seventy-four years ago.

As I have already said, boys were then sent to work in the pits at a very early age, sometimes from family necessity, sometimes, as parents said, 'to keep them out of a worse mischief.' My going to work, however, was a freak of my own. My father, thinking I would tire of it in a week, allowed me to make the trial, and had I not heard what he said, perhaps one week might have proved sufficient.

The 'liberty of the subject' was in no way curtailed by school boards or attendance officers, so that, free from all coercive measures, at the mature age of nine years, and of my own free choice, I proudly donned the pit-boy's flannels, and, with the 'bait poke'[1] over my shoulder and the candle-box in my

[1] 'Bait poke,' a bag containing food.

pocket, I looked down with pity on the poor boys who had to continue at school and struggle on with vulgar fractions, whilst I should not only earn some money but be initiated into what seemed to me the mysteries and the manly phraseology of a pit-boy's life.

My start in life was quite a notable event in our family, and for the time I was an object of special interest. My poor old grandmother sent me a good door-string, along with six farthing candles, and some of her best currant bread for my 'bait,' so that 'the poor bairn might have plenty of light and something nice to eat on his first day down the pit.' To this moment I have never seen candles burn so brightly as those did, nor have I tasted currant loaf to compare with hers at any time, but on that occasion in particular 'it capped all.'

With such a prospect before me it was no wonder that my sleep should on that Sunday night be somewhat broken, and that I needed no rousing when the caller came at three o'clock in the morning to knock us up for work. My father and mother arose, he to go to work with me and she to see me off. The 'calling course'[1] breakfast was eaten in silence, and I tried to keep up a brave heart when my mother quietly kissed me and bade me 'Good-morning.' Then, looking out into the darkness after us, as we rounded the corner of the house, she said, 'Be very careful, hinney, and mind what thi father says.' Then

[1] 'Calling course,' the hour when men are roused to go to work.

for the first time her voice seemed to falter, and a lump coming into my throat made me feel as if I would like to go back to her. With her tremulous tones sounding in my ears I kept on, close to my father's side, as he led me through the darkness, along the black wagon-way, up past the pit-pond, by the pick shop, and then to the pit-heap, where I soon found enough to engage my attention.

Just before me was the dark, deep shaft down which we were to pass to the regions below. The lofty, grimy, massive woodwork around the pit's mouth seemed all the more grim in the light of the flickering fire which sent out a volume of smoke from the large iron lamp close by. The clanking of the engines, the creaking of the pulleys overhead, and the running of the ropes in the shaft, with the hoarse voices of the men calling and answering between the top and the bottom of the pit, made me realize more fully the strangeness of my position and the importance of the step I had taken.

The present method of drawing coals out of the mine by means of cages running steadily in their wooden guides from the top of the pit to the bottom, and conveying men and boys up and down with comparative ease and safety, was not then in operation. Instead of a cage a long chain was attached to the rope, on which at equal distances were placed three hooks. From each hook was suspended a large basket made of strong hazel rods, closely interlaced and twisted round, as they were firmly fastened to an

iron bow. Such baskets were called 'corves,' and could carry from twenty to thirty pecks of coal. Generally, when men or lads were to ascend or descend, the corves were taken off and the hook was passed through a link of the chain, thus forming a large loop, in which two men each placed a leg. They grasped the chain with their arms, and a little boy was then set astride their knees. He grasped the chain with both hands, and they held him to themselves with their free arms. Then they were lowered a little till the loops above were similarly occupied, and sometimes the space between filled with lads clinging with arms and legs to the chain. Above the top loop ten to twenty or more lads would catch the chain, till fathoms of rope and chain, covered with human beings, dangled over the dark abyss.

On the morning in question, however, a corf filled with bricks hung from the end of the chain. My father seated himself on this, and the banksman lifted me on beside him. I grasped my father with one hand and the corf bow with the other, while he drew me closely to him with his free arm. My heart beat rapidly; a strange tremor crept over me as the corf swung gently to and fro over the mouth of the pit, and I ventured one look over the side, only to see the terrible depths of darkness into which we were about to descend. The creeping sensation seemed to rise from my toes to the topmost hair of my head. The engine-man gently drew us up a little, and then reversed the engine. We suddenly dropped out of

daylight, and the words, 'O mother!' involuntarily escaped my lips. My father heard, and, drawing me closely to him, he said in the pitmen's vernacular, 'Dinnet be flaid, hinney, aw hev had o' the.' Confidence and trembling, however, were strangely mingled as down, down, and still down we went, amid the clanging of the pumping apparatus behind a wooden partition in the shaft. The rushing noise of falling water and strong currents of air combined to increase the thrilling sensation and to make the dense darkness still more terrible. At length the downward motion became slower and still slower; and suddenly there appeared an opening, a light, and my own grandfather standing at the bottom to lift me off and calling me a brave lad. He put a lighted candle, set in a 'sticking of clay,' between my fingers, and showed me how to carry it in pitman's fashion. As I followed my father away, laughing, the old man clapped my head, saying, 'Keep thi heart up, hinney; thoo'll mak' a good pitman yet.'

Everything was new and strange to me; and as we passed along the narrow wagon-way, with its wall of coal on either side and its stone roof so near, it seemed to me a little world to live in. A few hundred yards brought us to a large trap-door, about six feet square, closing the whole avenue. This was to be my abiding-place for the next twelve or thirteen hours, and my father set to work to make a trapper's hole behind the props, in which I might sit safely and comfortably. After hewing out a good shelter for me

he put a nail in the door, to which he fastened my door-string, attaching the other end of it to a nail in a prop where I sat, so that I could pull the door open when the horse and wagons were coming through without exposing myself to danger. Then, after showing me where to stick my 'lowe,' i.e. to place my candle, and giving full instructions, he went away to his own work, and I was left alone. Presently the pit was in full work, and I felt pleasure in opening and closing my door as the bigger lads drove their horses and wagons, sometimes very quickly, along the rolley-way. In a few hours I was quite at home in my work, and proud of doing it without a mistake.

Several men passing through my door at various times spoke kindly to the new 'trapper,' and told me to take care and keep in my hole. But one man came through, wearing blue clothes, a leather cap with a peak behind, and carrying a stick in his hand. He looked very different from the other men, for his face and hands were clean, his jacket was buttoned, and his flannel shirt looked very white. I saw, too, that he carried a watch in his pocket, for the seals were hanging out, and altogether I was much impressed by his appearance. He was a big man, and seemed as 'one having authority.' He looked very sternly at me, as he held up his stick in a threatening way, and said, 'Now mind, ef thoo gans to sleep and dizzent keep that door shut, thou'll get it!' But as he went away I said to myself, 'Aw isn't gaun to sleep, and ef ye touch me ye'll get it when mi father comes out.'

However, as I meant to keep my door shut when no one was coming through, I hadn't much to fear; yet I could not help wishing that the 'blue man' might not come through my door again, but that he might get out some other way.

By-and-by another man came through with blue clothes on, but with less swagger than the first; he too had a stick, which he did not hold up to me. I thought he had such a nice face, as with a smile he said in a kindly tone, 'Now, hinney! is thoo the new trapper?' 'Yes, sir,' was the reply. 'Wey, hoo dis thoo like to keep a door?' 'Nicely, sir,' I answered. 'And hes thoo plenty cannels?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Wey, noo, watch the door, and mind tak' care, hinney, an' keep out o' the way o' the wagons.' As he left me I thought, 'What a canny blue man *that* is! Aw wish *he* may come through my door every day.'

I have often since then thought of these two men: the one was repellent in word and look, creating fear and dislike; he aimed to rule by fear; his stick was a rod of terror, every movement of which seemed to say, 'The further off the better.' My readers need not be told that obedience secured by fear is of that mechanical kind which goes no further than it can possibly help. The other man was attractive by his kindness; his first words and the tone of his voice won me. His stick of authority was a sceptre which I could and did often afterwards touch without fear. The one was a master; the other a masterer, whose

tact, common sense, and kindness of heart could mould me into anything he liked and get me to do any work he wanted. His kind words to me then and afterwards were like gleams of sunshine in the darkness; and though it is seventy years since I saw the 'canny blue man,' yet his kindness is gratefully remembered still. He is dead, and his words were only spoken to a little trapper-boy: yet they still live, for

Kind words can never die,
Cherished and blest,
God knows how deep they lie,
Stored in the breast:
Like childhood's simple rhymes,
Said o'er a thousand times,
Ay, in all years and climes
Distant and near.
Kind words can never die,
No, never die.

Oh, ye 'blue men,' be canny wi' the lads; it pays all round!

At length my father came. He was very black, and small pieces of coal were sticking in his whiskers, for he had been hewing very hard for a long time. He sat down, pleased to see me so cheerful, as I told him how I had done and all about the blue men. He laughed, and said the big man wouldn't hurt me, for he was not so bad as he looked. Still, that did not change my opinion of him, for I thought he might have spoken 'cannier' than that. My father stayed with me as long as he could, and as he rose to go home I saw the tears in his eyes and heard him, when a few yards away, say to himself, 'Aw wish ye'd

byeth been lasses.' My heart yearned for him, for I knew what he meant. If my brother and I had been girls he would never have had the painful anxiety of leaving us in the pit. Smothering down my feelings, I called after him: 'Tell my mother aw hev a lump o' spice bread yet, an' plenty o' cannels, an' aw isn't flaid.' I knew it would please them to think I was in no way uneasy. But as I looked after his light as far as I could see it, a feeling of loneliness came over me when I thought he had left the pit. As I looked on the wall of coal before and behind me, and on the roof overhead, home and friends seemed a long way off in the world aboye.

As the hours wore on the traffic of horses and wagons grew less, fewer men were passing, and once or twice no one came by for some time. During a long silent interval my candle went out, and, all alone in the darkness which might almost be felt, I sat in my hole afraid to breathe. The fearful silence grew very oppressive, till I noticed for the first time the sounds made by the gentle oozing of gas and of water escaping from the close-grained coal around me. A strange and harmonious combination of soft and pleasant sounds they made, delicately varied in tone, rising and falling, now feeble and now full, occasionally ceasing as if their force were spent, then again chiming in perfect concord. All the sounds, though independent of each other, combined to form a symphony which seemed very beautiful to the lonely trapper-boy.

These sounds had been audible all the day, but till my light went out and other sounds were stilled, I had not noticed them. So many blessings sent by the Father of Mercies are never acknowledged, nor even recognized, till the time of darkness comes, and in loneliness and silence of spirit we hear those voices which speak to us of the goodness of God. As I sat listening I fancied that the sounds were like one of our Sunday-school tunes, and I began to sing the fine old hymn, 'My God, the spring of all my joys.' And though not understanding it all very clearly, yet when I came to that line, 'In darkest shades, if Thou appear,' it did seem to me that some connexion existed between the words and the real darkness around. I sang the hymn through, and repeated it, till I felt it was not so very dark and lonely after all: for the meaning of the hymn became clearer as a new light sprang up in my heart. Then I thought I would pray, and, kneeling in my hole, I lifted up my heart to God. I do not remember what I said, but there was a solemn sense of being alone with God and the assurance that He heard my petition.

Not long after that the canny blue man came to tell me that it was 'kenner,' or time to go home. He had promised to see me safe out of the pit, and, taking me on his knee in the loop, he brought me to bank, where my father was waiting to receive me. As we went up the wagon-way in the dusk my mother stood at the row-end looking for me, and I had such a welcome, and such a dinner, and such a story to tell

my brother about the 'wonders of the deep.' And so ended my first day down the pit.

After being a week or two at work, I sat one morning behind my door. For some time no one passed my way; my candle burned out, and I was in total darkness. As I sat musing alone my eye was attracted by something white about two yards from me, and the longer I gazed at it the clearer and brighter it seemed to become. What it might be I could not imagine. I had heard people talk of 'haunts' and 'ghosts,' and I thought that surely this must be something of the kind. I spoke, but received no answer. The object on which my eyes were fixed was not more than two inches broad. Fear began to rise and deepen every moment, till I was quite terror-stricken, and for some time must have remained in that condition. How long a time passed I cannot say, for the terror left no room in my mind for anything but the appearance before me. At last one of the officials of the mine came through my door. He found me without light, eyes fixed, and mouth open. Seeing my vacant stare, he touched me and said, 'Lad, what's the matter wi' thoo?' The voice and touch brought me back to myself, and I said tremulously, 'Oh! canny man, there's a white thing just there in the dark, but I cannot see it now. Tak' me away fra here!' Moving his lamp to the other side of the door, he said, 'Now tell me where it is.' In the darkness I saw it at once, and pointed it out. He took my hand and led me up to it. Placing my

hand on the white object, he said, 'Now stand still and keep thi hand there.' He then brought back his candle and showed me that the fearsome white thing was only a prop, shining because it was decaying, and visible only in the darkness. This explanation at once laid the ghost, and though I have seen many curious things I have never since seen a ghost. When my friend left me with a newly-lit candle, another fancy seized me. I would have some good out of that ghost, and taking out my little pocket-knife I cut slices of the shining wood from the prop. These I cut into small pieces, which, with my ball of clay, I fixed to the roof and walls here and there. Then, hiding my light, I had the pleasure of gazing on a starry firmament of my own. Thus what began as a fear and a trouble was converted into a source of enjoyment and a relief to the monotony of the mine.

Many years after I had another experience, involving real cause for terror. The miner is often surrounded by dangers of which he is quite unaware. On the occasion to which I now refer I was pushing a tub of coals along the tramway, when I heard a man calling very loudly and excitedly, 'Put out thi cannel!' which I at once did. 'Now run for thi life,' he cried, 'an' get all the leets put out down that side. Then run down the far-off old bord to the other side of the flat, an' get all the leets put out reet out to the flat. There's a terrible blower o' gas come off!' Listening, I could hear the hissing sound of the escaping gas forced from some hidden accumula-

tion within the coal by the supervening weight. I knew that this gas would mingle with the current of air which slowly traversed the passages, and that as soon as it came in contact with a naked light an explosion was sure to follow, in which we might all lose our lives. Though greatly excited I remained cool, and ran in the dark, calling to every one, 'Put out your lights! The gas has come off!' So I ran to those beyond in the passages, where the gas would travel with the air. One man, being unaware of the imminent danger, refused to put out his light. Seizing a piece of coal I threw it at the candle, and knocked it out without apology, and ran on, followed by fierce imprecations.

All hands, boys and men, started for the shaft as soon as warned of the danger, so as to get out of the pit as speedily as possible. Nearing an entrance into another part of the pit, I perceived that as the air returned from the places we had left it would pass into this tunnel and endanger all the lives of workers in that district. A brave young fellow at once set out on the perilous journey, urging the rest to get out as quickly as possible, and he would take his chance. Running in the dark is an awkward thing, as every miner knows. Happily, the air had some distance to travel before reaching this place, and the messenger was able to get all the lights extinguished in that district also, and the men followed him to the shaft. The clothes we had put off while working were left behind, and wearing only the short drawers and

armless body-shirts, we reached the shaft and ascended. All reached the surface safely, leaving only the officials, who remained to try to direct the current of gas-laden air into the upcast shaft.

At the top of the pit the colliery manager met us, and, not being fully aware of the danger below, wished us to go back to work—a thing which would now not be permitted on any account. Though it was just after midnight, we started for home just as we were. The blower did not cease to discharge for some time, and when the pit was again workable no naked lights were permitted, Davy lamps being substituted.

On another occasion two other lads were working with me at night, our business being to fill loose coal into tubs and bring these to a place appointed. No other persons were working near us. The mines were not so well ventilated then as they are now, and having learned by experience the danger that existed where the current was weak, I took extra precautions. My friends were working a little distance beyond me. The feeble current of air, with nothing to direct it, was passing from me to them. I fixed my candle about two feet from the floor of the mine at the end of the place, and went up a few yards where it was almost dark, to fill a tub. My mates came alone to me, and one of them suddenly exclaimed, ' Parkinson, what's the matter wi' thi' lowe? It's blue up the sides.' Looking round, I perceived instantly that the place was filling with gas, and that an explosion was

imminent. I said in a whisper, 'Be perfectly still; don't move a hand.' I lay down and cautiously crept towards my candle. I was afraid to breathe, for the slightest movement of the flame might cause the gas to ignite. Slowly I raised my hand to the candle, above which was the blue flickering flame which indicated the presence of gas in the air above. I drew the light down very gently, and slowly inverted it so that the melted grease should extinguish the dangerous flame. As it went out a great sense of relief came to us all. We crept slowly along against the current of air, and in total darkness made our way to the shaft and alarmed the officials. Next day the pit was idle; but we had escaped, and were truly thankful for another deliverance from the dangers that then lay thick on every hand.

CHAPTER III

The Men of my Early Days

THE strenuous life of the pitmen, the general lack of education, and the influence of the Methodist services, all combined to produce a special type of character. Shrewd in mind, kindly of heart, and sincere and simple in spirit, they lived amid hardships and difficulties utterly unknown to the present generation of their descendants.

Their work in Sunday school and their conversation in the class-meeting were marked by deep earnestness and thorough conviction of the truths of religion. The clenched fist struck into the palm of the other hand gave emphasis to their words, and the Bible stories, adapted to the capacities of their scholars and told in pitman's phrases, went home to heart and mind. As I recall their memory, certain particular figures stand out very vividly.

Old Stephen was one of these. He had a cheery face, a kindly heart, and a ready wit, combined with great shrewdness and knowledge of human nature, all of which qualities helped to create a genial atmosphere in which it was easy and pleasant to breathe. He knew his Bible and his hymn-book so well that his class-meeting was always an enjoyable hour. At one time he had a member who was well read in

Wesley's *Sermons* and his *Christian Perfection*, but was nevertheless very censorious in spirit and not too amiable in temper.

In one class-meeting Old Stephen asked, 'Well, John, how are you getting on?' 'Oh, very well, Stephen; I think I am making progress.' 'And what makes you think that?' 'I am not so hasty in temper as I was.' 'That's a good sign,' said the old man, 'for there was room for improvement.' 'Yes,' said John, 'I am hoping soon to reach that happy state *when calm on tumult's wheel I'll sit midst busy multitudes alone.*' 'Ah,' said Stephen, 'thou'll never get on, John.' 'By the grace of God I will, Stephen.' 'What! thoo sit still on tumult's wheel? If the Lord was to lift thee on now, without any further effort of thee own, thoo couldn't sit still five minutes! In thi restlessness thou wad put both feet into the spokes and go for somebody.' It was so true to life as to produce a ripple of laughter all round the classroom.

The good old man in his dying hours requested to be left alone for a short time. Half-an-hour afterwards, on returning to the room, the family found his Bible on the bed beside him, open at the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, the spectacles thereon, his last reading having been of 'the Father's house with its many mansions, the family gathering, and the assurance of being for ever with the Lord.'

Another class-leader of the same period was Dodds Charlton, or 'Doddsey,' as he was familiarly and affectionately called. He had a large family, and

at times passed through great hardships. He was killed by a fall of stone in 1849. His transparent simplicity of character was such that men who questioned the sincerity and reality of most Christian professors never challenged his character. 'If ever there was a good man it was Dodds Charlton,' was once said in my hearing by a rough pitman. At one of his class-meetings Bessy —— was very despondent, as she often had cause to be. She told her tale, and the leader, looking kindly but quizzically at her, replied, 'Wey, Bessy, thou makes a big mistake! Thou reaches one arm out over the past six weeks, and the other over the coming six weeks, and rakes all the troubles together to bring to one class-meeting. It's "As thy *day* so shall thy strength be," not as thy *quarter*. Remember, thou's on by the day.'

During a revival several of his family went to the 'penitent form' on the same night. The dear fellow raised his hands as he saw them go forward, and exclaimed, 'Lord! I know now what Thou starved us back here for.' He had been driven back to Lambton from another colliery by the bad trade and insufficient wages there received, and he believed that God's purpose was to bring his bairns to Himself in that place and way.

George Stranghair and Jim Rutherford had quarrelled. For five or six weeks they did not speak, either at pit or chapel. On the Sunday after Christmas Day the sacrament was to be observed. When

Jim reached home after the afternoon service he paced the floor for some time in silence and evident trouble of mind. At last he broke out, 'I'm going down to Low Pittington.' 'Wait till after tea,' replied his wife. 'No, I must go now.' 'What do you want to do there?' she asked. 'I must see George and make peace. I cannot take the sacrament with this trouble between us.' 'Well,' she said, 'maybe ye'll only differ worse.' 'Never mind,' said he, 'I'm going to try.' On arriving at Stranghair's house, James found George and his wife sitting at tea. He entered and called out, 'Brother George, let's have a wag o' thy hand!' 'Dis thoo mean that?' exclaimed George. 'Aye,' cried James, 'we canna gan to the Lord's table this way. The young folks is takkin' notice of our ways. So let's be down on our knees.' And so the difference was ended at once; and at night the two reconciled friends sang from the same book, and George told the assembled members how James and he had come together again in Christian fellowship.

Such were the Methodist pitmen of that day, and I could multiply sketches of such characters far beyond what is needed for this volume. The very type has vanished. They rest from their labours, but their works still follow them. Dodds Charlton has two great-grandsons in the Wesleyan Methodist ministry to-day—a fact which would have rejoiced his heart beyond measure could he have known.

CHAPTER IV

'Old Joe'

JOE had been sent to work at the pit before he was eight years of age. The hours of labour were then so long that boys seldom saw daylight, except on Sunday, for six months in the year. From home in the early morning to the pit; to home late at night; a hasty meal, a wash, and go to bed—this was the general run of a pit-boy's life. On Saturday the day's work was somewhat shorter, so that in the afternoon or night the pit clothes were laid aside and the ordinary clothes put on.

One Saturday night, when Joe was in his early manhood, he was walking along a row of houses in the village, and was accosted by a good man, who said, 'Joe, aw want ye te come te the prayer-meetin' to-night; it's at ma hoose at sivven o'clock.'

'Wey, man,' Joe said, 'aw daren't come in.'

'Wey, man, thor's nowt to be flaid on; thoo can come in and sit aback o' the door. My pit claes lies under the lether (ladder), where thoo can get a canny seat oot o' the way, and neebody'll see tha.'

As Joe was returning a little after seven o'clock, he heard the singing and turned in. Finding the vacant spot under the ladder behind the door, he

took his seat on the good man's pit clothes and thought he was comfortably out of the way.

The leader of the meeting, in his opening prayer, after thanking God for safety and for His watchful providence over them during the week, prayed earnestly for a blessing upon all present, mentioning one after another by their names, and then prayed: 'O Lord, save Joe H——; save him now, Lord; save Joe to-night. Thoo'll find him sittin' upon ma pit claes under the lether aback o' the door.' And Joe—as he used to tell the story—felt himself face to face with his Maker, asked to be saved, and was quietly and gently led into peace with God through Christ. Henceforth his life was devoted to the service of his new Master.

In after-years, when married, and with a family growing up around him, he often felt the pinch of poverty. Not physically strong, his earnings were small and his means were scanty.

I once heard him giving his experience in a love-feast; and after telling the story of his conversion as already related, he said:

'Noo, ye young folks, lissen! Aw want te tell yer aboot God's goodness to me. Yer can call it "providence," or "special providence," or any providence yer like; but *aw* call it the goodness of God and man to me. My leg was broken by an accident in the pit. Aw lay for nineteen weeks withoot bein' able to work. We were then reduced to a verra low ebb, for Friendly Societies were not then as they are

now, and aw had nothin' comin' in, so the meal-tub was empty and the cupboard was bare. There was no prospect o' me gettin' te work, and things didn't look verra bright. One night, just aboot the worst, oor Sallie was sittin' by the fire. She was half-undressed, wi' her feet upon the fender, sittin' lookin' into the fire verra gloomy. Aw looked oot behind the curtains, and said, "Sallie, wat's the matter, yor not comin' te bed?"

'"Joe,' she said, "it's ne use, aw cannot sleep. Wey, aw've sung the bairns te bed without ther suppers, and there isn't a bite i' the hoose for ther breakfasts, and aw'm just at ma wits' end."

'"Then it's time, ma lass, for the Lord te work; thoo'd better come to bed and leave Him to mind His awn business."

'She says, "Aye, Joe, when thoo's at the chapel thoo can talk weel eneuf, but when it comes to things like this, thoo talks like a man wi' nee heed on."

'So,' said Joe, 'I just told the Lord all aboot it—to tak oor Sallie and all the concern intiv His awn hands. She came te bed and went to sleep, and the next morning at sivven o'clock there is a knockin' at the door. Sallie opened it, and saw the shop-keeper's boy standing. He says, "If ye please, ma'am, yer have to come up; the master wants ye."

'She says, "Tell him, hinney, that Joe hasn't getten te work. I hae ne money; it's ne use me comin' te the shop."

'"Please, ma'am," the lad says, "it isn't money;

ye hae to come, he wants ye." So she put on her bonnet, and off she went, and aw was wonderin' whether the Lord hadn't been workin' some way or another for us—becaas sleep or wakin', it's all the same wi' Him. Presently she comes back, and the shop-lad win her, wi' a handcart, and he brings in a bag o' floor and some parcels. She says, " Joe, there's somebody been at the shop last night; aw cannot tell whe it is, but he's paid for us a fortnight's groceries and floor."

'Aw watched her,' said Joe. 'Aw saw the poonds o' sugar, and the butter, and the bacon, and the coffee, and the soap, tea, and some currants; and she says, " Noo, what dis thoo think o' that, Joe? "

'" Wey, aw'll tell thoo what aw think, Sallie. Aw like the Lord te mak my marketin' a good deal better than thoo." For ye see, hinnies, aw knew that oor Sallie's marketin' often ran oot before the next pay-Friday, and the Lord's fortnight's groceries served us six weeks. Aw like the Lord, hinnies, te mak my marketin', better than oor Sallie.

'Noo,' he said, 'that's one leaf out of a long chapter o' the Lord's goodness to me.'

In his later days he went to work at a new colliery where there was no chapel, and Joe at once applied for a colliery house in which a Sunday school and religious service might be held. The request was granted, and before long Joe, with others, succeeded in getting a small chapel built for the use of the place.

The services were well attended and became very

successful, attracting the attention of those who were unfavourable to Methodism and who did not scruple to use their influence to repress what they looked upon as Methodist innovation and irregularity. Poor Joe became what is sometimes known as a 'marked man,' and received his notice to leave his work and quit the place. He removed to another colliery village some three miles away, but every Sunday morning found him back at his duties in the chapel referred to, caring for and nursing the little cause he had been the chief means of establishing. This duty continued up to the time of his death.

It is now over thirty years since Joe passed away from the strifes of man and the toils of life, but the seed sown has brought forth fruit, and spread. As the population has increased, the influence of the little chapel has become stronger. The old opposers have long since passed away; a new chapel has been erected at a cost of £1,100, the present owners of the colliery having given the ground, with a liberal donation, and purchased the old chapel for a village reading-room, at a higher price than its original cost. The men who are toiling at the erection of the new chapel do not seem to be aware of the history of the old one, or how much they and the villagers owe to the influence and devotion of the good old man whose life helped to raise the platform of their present operations.

I walked twenty-two miles, eleven miles each way, to see him before he died. He heard my voice as I

entered the house. Putting his hand out from behind the curtains, he said, 'Let's have a wag of thi hand. What has thoo come for?'

'Well, I heard you were getting down to the Jordan valley, and I wanted to see you before you went over.'

'Well, I'm suffering a great deal of pain, and if the Lord comes for ma to-night I'll go thankfully; and if I have to wait for a month or two yet, I'll wait patiently; but thoo can tell my old friends where yer live yonder, Tommy C—— and Dickie S—— and Joe H—— and them, that it's far easier dyin' than aw thowt it was, and that the Lord all the way through has been as good as His word, and He's gannin' to be wi' ma all the way to the end.'

On bidding him good-bye, he said, 'They'll send yer word when I'm gone, and you will know where I've gone to.'

'Yes.'

'An' thoo'll be comin'? I'll look out for tha, but I hope thoo'll be a good bit a-comin' yet. The Lord has some more work for tha. Good-bye, hinney, good-bye, and the Lord be wi' thee.'

Joe died, and a life of poverty and toil, but one of rare goodness, ended when he entered into the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

All through life Joe was poor in this world's goods, but for many years he was rich in faith and love to God and man. He left behind him the influence of

a character and example which has continued in active force until to-day, as the following story will show:—

Some years ago, after a very successful Sunday-school demonstration, the teachers of the various schools met for a social gathering—a sort of interchange of personal experience in Sunday-school work. Several teachers spoke of their early training in the Sunday school, the impressions made, the truths learnt, and how they had been led to God. Some beautiful testimonies to the example and influence of good men were given. One man, standing up, said: 'I was never favoured with a training like any of yours. I was brought up a Roman Catholic; I never saw a Bible, and knew nothing of its teaching. I became very wicked, and in early life learnt to swear. The habit became strong, and the practice constant. I went to work for the first time in a colliery in Pelton Fell. There were two men in the pit from whom I took away the coals as they hewed them. They were very nice men, and always ready to help me. They used to reprove me for swearing, and were so kind that their words often made an impression on me. I did not know they were religious men, but I thought they were good men.

'One day one of them said, "We are going to have a love-feast at the Methodist chapel on Sunday. If thoo'll come aw'll get thee in."

'He did not know I was a Roman Catholic, and as it was a feast I thought I would go to see what it was like. I went, and he met me at the door and took

me in. I wondered when they sung and prayed, and the feast was a piece of bread and a drink of water. I thought it wasn't much of a feast.

'They began to speak what they called their "experience"; and these two men spoke, and it was so natural, and so true to what I saw of them, that I thought I would watch them closely. During the week I was so impressed by their goodness that I thought I would like to have their religion, for it did seem to me of the right kind when it made men good like that. These men's example led to my conversion. I believe they are both dead long since, and they never knew that "Billy," as they called me, had been converted to God by their influence.'

Knowing the place referred to, and many of the old Methodist miners there, I said, 'What were the names of your friends?'

He replied, 'Joe Humble and Dodds Charlton.'

I said, 'Let me shake your hand, my friend; they were two of my best friends, whose influence over me was also great for good.'

The speaker is now a man well advanced in years, has five sons and two daughters, all of whom are fairly well married and settled in life, living in different places, but all connected with the Methodist Church and actively engaged in its services.

Two of Old Joe's sons are local preachers, both highly esteemed for their work's sake, and one of his grandsons is in the Wesleyan ministry.

CHAPTER V

The Miners' Permanent Relief Fund

IN the year 1844 a great strike occurred in the coal trade, and lasted nineteen weeks. Soon after work was resumed, a terrible explosion took place in the pit at Haswell. As I knew many of the pitmen there, I walked over to see their families. In the Long Row every house save one had its dead. In one house five coffins stood—two on the bed, two on the dresser, and one on the floor. Seventy victims were claimed by the fiery blast of death.

For the widows and children made by this explosion no provision of any kind existed at that time. As I walked down the gloom-stricken rows the thought occurred to me that some regular systematic arrangement ought to be made to meet the needs of the victims of these disasters, which were then so frequent, and which even yet startle us at intervals out of our easy complacency.

Not till nearly twenty years after was any step taken, however. Then the Hartley accident took place, and two hundred men and lads died of hunger or suffocation in that mine. Public sympathy was aroused and stimulated by the kindly letter of Queen Victoria to the bereaved, and a large sum of money was subscribed for the relief of the distressed families.

The Miners' Permanent Relief Fund

But some of the miners themselves decided on a step which has led to very great and remarkable developments. Without data for calculation, without experience, without anything but the firm determination not to be dependent on casual charity, a society was formed named the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund. Permanency was to be its chief character, since the number of deaths caused by great disasters which attracted general attention and benevolence was a trifle when compared with the number lost in every-day routine, one or two at a time.

Those who formed the society arranged the subscriptions at a small sum per fortnight—'a pint o' beer and a half-ounce of 'baccy,' as I have heard it described. At first the membership was very small, and the first balance-sheet only dealt with the total sum of £62. Soon, however, the benefits became known, and a strong propagandist effort was undertaken by the agents, Messrs. Alexander Blythe and John Howey. Many members were enrolled, funds increased, and to-day practically every miner on the Durham and Northumberland coalfield is included in the membership of that society. Three millions of money have been paid to the widows and orphans of miners killed by accident, as support during incapacity similarly caused, and as superannuation benefits to old workmen who were past work. But for this fund, all that money would have been drawn from the ratepayers.

CHAPTER VI

My Last Day Down the Pit

IT was a cold November morning in 1850. A keen, cutting frost was hardening the path, as it quickened my steps along the narrow lane leading to the mine into which I was about to descend. The sky was beautifully clear, and through the vast expanse of cloudless blue, myriads of stars twinkling in all their brightness and beauty were literally 'declaring the glory of their great Creator,' while the firmament as truly 'showed His handiwork.'

The Sabbath had only just passed, and under the influence of its associations my mind was naturally more susceptible to such thoughts; whilst the joyous strains of the Sunday night service, closely followed by the brief sleep, the compulsory rising at midnight, and the change from the Sunday clothes to the pitman's flannels, not unnaturally suggested thoughts of that Sabbath which no Monday morning shall ever follow and of the rest which no 'caller' shall ever disturb.

These musings, however, soon gave place to thoughts of present duty and the work before me, as the old church clock in the distance faintly pealed the solitary stroke which ushered in another week of busy toil and forcibly reminded me that 'the end was not yet.'

In a few more minutes I had reached the colliery, and stood waiting my turn to 'go down.' A large iron lamp, full of burning coals, shed a fitful, lurid glare on the mouth of the pit, and dimly revealed through clouds of smoke the engine-house and the grimy, massive framework around the shaft, with the ropes and pulley-wheels resting thereon. A few empty iron tubs and stacks of timber ready for use in the mine filled in the foreground, while a row of coal-wagons standing under the screens loomed immediately behind. Altogether my environment, with its noise and din, strikingly contrasted with the silent walk through the fields and the clear star-lit skies which a few minutes before had so interested and occupied my mind, all, however, disappearing in the grimy surroundings and stern realities of a miner's toil.

My turn to descend soon came, and with others I entered the close iron cage which hung over the shaft; and leaving the upper world with its landscape, skies, and stars behind us—alas! some of us leaving them for ever—down we rapidly went into the regions of darkness, where no sunlight ever relieves the abiding gloom nor singing birds announce the dawn of day. Revelation tells us, respecting heaven, 'There shall be no night there.' Nature tells us, respecting a coal-mine, 'There shall be no day there.' The monotony of the mine is simply monotony itself. The darkness never changes. The seasons make no difference. Spring and summer, autumn and winter, morning, noon, and night, are all the same. Coal and

stone, stone and coal—above, around, beneath—ever meet the eye in the feeble light of a candle or a safety lamp. Such is the environment of a miner's toil, often pregnant with the pent-up forces of destruction and death. His is indeed the path set forth by Job in his graphic description of mines and mining in his day: 'A path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen. The lion's whelps have not trodden it.' 'A land of darkness itself and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.'

The miner, however, is from his very boyhood as familiar with this darkness and monotony as he is with the dangers to which he is exposed; and though that familiarity often leads him to the discharge of duty under circumstances from which the untrained workman or stranger would shrink, he is neither so reckless of the danger nor so thoughtless of the consequences as is often alleged. Of course, there are reckless miners as there are reckless railway servants, reckless soldiers and sailors—in fact, reckless men in every department of life, who do daring and foolish things and unnecessarily risk their own lives and the lives of others. But I venture to affirm, after a life-long experience amongst them, that miners as a class are certainly not more reckless than other men who are daily familiar with danger; and seldom indeed, if ever, have any of the heavy calamities in our coal mines been directly traceable to such a cause.

Now, just as the circumstances of his daily toil

are exceptional, so is his danger peculiar, his peril being often greatest when he is least aware of the fact: sometimes from a treacherous roof or falling coal, which, in spite of every precaution and without the slightest warning, will in a moment bury him beneath; or it may be by the closing of the shaft, or a sudden influx of water, by which he is literally entombed alive—'Laid,' as the Psalmist says, 'in the lowest pit in darkness, and in the deeps,' 'shut up, and cannot come forth.' But what he dreads most of all, and what he as a rule has the least chance of discovering, is the invisible gas, which may be noiselessly accumulating near him without the slightest indication, and the explosion of which so suddenly turns the busy hive of industry into the silent and gloomy chambers of the dying and the dead.

So it was on the morning in question, when about a hundred and eighty men and boys, as usual, entered the pit, and, threading their way through the long narrow passages to their respective places of toil, commenced the duties of the day without the slightest apprehension of immediate danger or sign of impending peril, and over the wide area of the mine work generally was soon in full swing.

At one point, however, the explosive gas had been slowly accumulating entirely unnoticed, whilst the current of air passing within a few yards of the spot not only left it undisturbed, but gradually increasing; and slowly it stole along the narrow passage to where a coal-hewer had for two hours been toiling *within*

a few feet of death. Yet, all unconscious of his awful nearness to the eternal world, he kept diligently plying his pick, whilst the subtle, invisible foe crept on, inch by inch, nearer and nearer, till it silently hovered over the naked light, and there came the fatal touch, the sudden flash, and the roar of hissing flame, instantly scorching the stalwart toiler into a blackened corpse. 'The angel of death spread his wings on the blast,' as it swept through the mine with increasing fury, creating consternation and terror, to some as short-lived as it was sudden, for with one wild shriek for mercy 'Their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still.'

In less than two minutes the work of destruction was over, leaving here and there, as was afterwards discovered, timber and tubs, horses and human bodies, scattered or wedged together by the force of the blast. The main road being blocked by a heavy fall from the roof, the air-currents were for some time suspended, leaving the deadly choke-damp to make short work with those who came under its power. The stir and din of busy toil had suddenly given place to the fearful stillness and gloom of death, and for the time it seemed as if the grim king of terrors swayed his sceptre uncontrolled.

The explosion had occurred a considerable distance from where I was working. My place, being only seventy yards from the shaft, was reached by a single passage, entirely apart from the main line along which the explosion had swept, so that a solid

mass of unworked coal separated me from the course the blast had taken. I had just returned from the shaft with an empty tub when the explosion occurred. The shock was terrific, and powerful enough to be felt on the surface; to use the words of the Psalmist, 'The earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills were moved and shaken.'

Knowing too well what it meant, I seized the lamp, which owing to my sheltered position had not been blown out, and ran for the shaft, about six yards from which I met a dense cloud of dust and deadly choke-damp, completely filling the seam, slowly and solidly moving into the drift where I stood. But not the slightest sound or movement was to be heard, all being still and silent as the grave. The busy workers I had left there five minutes before had disappeared, and the well-known voices all seemed hushed in death.

The sudden silence was terrible, and the awful feeling that all hands were lost and there was no hope for me made it more terrible still. Thoughts of father and mother, home and friends, of Christ and God, flashed through my mind more quickly than I can write them. The cloud of dust and choke-damp was coming nearer; and whilst I knew that to retreat was almost certain death, and to go forward seemed almost equally fatal, yet therein lay my only chance—to struggle through and climb the shaft if possible.

Committing my soul to God, I rushed into the cloud. A stifling feeling seized my chest, and my breathing at once became short and thick; yet, with

one violent effort in the struggle for life, I climbed over the tubs and timber which had been blown together, reached the top of the cage which rested thereon, and so stood within the shaft. Gasping and hopeless, I leaned against the framework, when a tremulous draught of cool, fresh air crept slowly over me, and I *breathed* again, with strange sensations, the '*breath of life*,' for life it was—unexpected life—as the pure air of heaven silently drove back the poisonous fumes which in a few moments at most must have extinguished the already flickering lamp of life; and though sixty years have passed since then, the feelings of that moment, with the indescribable sense of relief then experienced, are, as I write the story, again realized with a vividness and excitement of feeling beyond the power of expression, either by voice or pen, and must perforce remain among the things which cannot be told.

With the current of air which had so relieved me hope revived, and leaving my position I pressed my way round to the back of the shaft, where we usually ascended, passing as I went the dead body of the poor lad who a few minutes before had helped me away with the tub. Just at that moment I was startled by a voice feebly asking, 'What is the matter?' and turning round I found a man lying amongst the timber where he had been thrown, just again becoming conscious. He was very much shaken, and lifting him up, I helped him into the cage in which we were accustomed to 'ride' (i.e. go

up). On trying to signal to the surface we were suddenly lifted and rapidly drawn up the shaft, excitedly praising God for our unexpected deliverance from the jaws of death.

On reaching the surface my mate was conveyed at once to his home, and he ultimately recovered. Prompt action being necessary, I was anxious again to descend, in the hope of rescuing any who might be near the shaft. Being greatly relieved by a few minutes in the fresh air I entered the cage, when two men who had just arrived at the pit joined me, and we at once descended, leaving all above very anxious as to the result.

At the bottom of the shaft we found the air travelling slowly, and the choke-damp, though considerably broken, still painfully perceptible. A groan, however, from the mass of débris before us told that some one alive lay buried beneath. Tubs and timber were quickly removed, and in a few minutes we reached the body of a young man. Gently drawing him out from his perilous position, we found him helpless and unable to speak. Carrying him into the cage, one of my mates entered with me, whilst the other 'rapped'—i.e. signalled—us away, he bravely remaining alone for further search.

As soon as we reached the surface the poor sufferer was carefully conveyed to his home, and though severely injured, he recovered and lived to be an old man. A number of volunteers were now ready to enter the mine, but owing to the choke-damp little

progress could be made. A large and rapidly increasing crowd of people had already gathered round the pit: some, in frantic excitement, dreading the worst, whilst many were anxiously inquiring if I thought there was any hope for those below.

Having little such hope, and being unable to render further help, I started for home, and hastened along the road as quickly as possible. The news, however, reached the village just before me, and great excitement prevailed. My father and brother, hearing the noise, sprang out of bed; my mother ran to the door and, seeing me running, stood speechless till I lifted my hand and called out with a faltering voice, 'Mother! I am no worse.' In a moment more I stood by her side. . . . We entered the house together. . . . Words for some moments were few. Suffice it to say there was a deep sense of thankfulness and a subdued feeling of joy in that house, mingled with sadness and sorrow for the fate of others.

My father, with many more, was soon on his way to the pit, to assist in exploring for those of whose fate nothing more had been heard. One poor woman, living near us, came in great excitement, asking if I had seen her 'lad,' her 'canny Bob.' Alas! I had seen him, for it was her 'canny Bob' whose dead body I had passed at the bottom of the shaft. But what could I answer? How could I tell a poor distracted mother, hoping and fearing for her only son, that I had seen him dead? But she pressed the

question, adding, 'If he is alive you must have seen him, for he is working at the shaft.' I tried to evade answering her directly, but she drew her own conclusions, which were all too soon confirmed, for his was the first body brought out of the pit, and the cart with the shattered remains appeared at the door where a few hours before she had heard from the now cold and silent lips his last 'Good morning, mother.'

After resting awhile I returned to the pit, feeling anxious to learn if there was any hope of more being saved. Several thousands of people had now gathered round the mine, anxiously waiting for news from below. Little, however, had yet been learned beyond the difficulties which the explorers had to encounter, the choke-damp being still so oppressive that the strongest men had now and then to retire.

They had, however, found two young men lying together, who, though terribly burnt, were still living, and in the dark and awful loneliness were both, when found, audibly whispering their prayers to God. One was a Roman Catholic, and the other a Primitive Methodist. Near the latter lay his New Testament which he had received at the Sunday school, and had taken, as lads sometimes did, to the pit for use as opportunity offered. The book, burnt and shattered, was afterwards given to me as a memento of friendship with its owner. That keepsake I still possess, and read therefrom my family lesson every year on November 11, the anniversary of my deliverance and 'last day down the pit.'

The lives of these two young men were beautifully consistent with their profession of religion. Their creeds were widely different, but both the lads were *good*, and whatever might be the creed or church of Johnny Keltay, the Irish lad, or of Johnny Fenwick, the English lad, no one could question their sincere piety or challenge their godly lives. They worked together in peace, they suffered together in darkness, they were found side by side breathing out their prayers to God in silence, and within an hour of each other they died, no doubt meeting in that better world, where all distinctions of church and creed are unknown and all are one in Him who liveth for evermore.

A little beyond where they were found the explosion had swept out the timber for some distance, and a heavy fall of stone completely blocked the passage. Able and willing workers entered on the arduous and perilous task of opening a way through, quite under the impression, however, that all beyond were dead, as the workers themselves were suffering so much from the choke-damp that every now and then some one had to retire and another took his place.

In the midst of this sad and dreary toil they were suddenly startled by the sound of a voice, faintly heard through the mass of stone before them. For a moment the toilers stood in breathless silence, as one of them called loudly in reply. When the voice again was heard, every one stood in trembling suspense as questions were asked and answers given.

'Who is there?'

'Willie Fairley,' was the reply.

'Are there many alive?'

'Yes, and several dead.'

With this discovery the excitement became greater than ever. Danger seemed to be forgotten, every nerve and muscle being strained for the rescue; and the noble fellows, with the instinctive energy and forgetfulness of self which the North of England pitmen always show when human life is at stake, cheered each other on in the work of delivering their fellows from their gloomy and hitherto hopeless imprisonment beyond.

The good news was at once sent to the surface, and as the messenger stepped out of the cage he excitedly announced in a loud voice, 'There's a lot of men and lads alive!' The thrilling news spread through the immense crowd, which for some minutes swayed to and fro like a field of wheat under a stirring breeze. Men involuntarily grasped each other's hands in wild excitement as they thanked God for the joyful news. Mothers, wives, and daughters, whose tears had been dried up in the bitterness of their sorrow, wept again in gladness and wrung each other's hands for joy. One woman, whose son was in the pit, grasping her husband's arm, said with all the intensity of a mother's feelings, 'O Bill! we may see him alive yet.' Tears forced their way down many a strong man's cheeks as he looked upon the strangely mingled scene. But with the knowledge that several were dead

the excitement sobered down, and a subdued feeling followed, alternating between hope and fear in the uncertainty as to who were living and who were dead.

In another hour an opening was made over the top of the fall, through which several of the explorers made their way; and after helping Fairley and his mate through the opening they pressed on, passing several dead bodies on their way, till they reached the place where 148 men and boys were waiting for deliverance or death.

The appearance of the rescuers was hailed by the imprisoned men with feelings more easily conceived than described. Batch after batch were at once sent forward with one of the explorers in charge, their hearts sinking within them as they passed by the dead and occasionally recognized the faces of some with whom a few hours before they had entered the mine. One after another they passed through the narrow opening made over the fall, and were sent up to the surface, where some touching scenes were witnessed as cage after cage came up with the rescued and the face of father, husband, son, or brother was seen making its way through the opening crowd. Some received their own in a silence they could not break, and others in an excitement of feeling they could not control.

One poor mother, grasping her son, exclaimed, 'The dead's alive, the lost is found.'

Another woman, whose little boy—only ten years of age—was in the pit for the first time, after standing

on a block of timber for some hours, where she could see the cage as it came to the surface, watching with an eagle eye each group of the rescued as they came up, at length saw the long-looked-for face of her boy amongst others in the age. Springing from where she stood, and forcing her way through the crowd with almost superhuman strength, she seized her lad from the banksman's hand and folded him closely to her breast without a word. The crowd gave way before her, and strong men wept as they saw her, with firm-set lips, pale, wan face, and hurried step, turn aside into the lane beyond the crowd, where she dropped down on the grass and sat rocking her child with the deeply agitated feelings which a mother's heart alone can know.

During the day, when the story of the rescued men was told, it was found that the force of the explosion had broken an opening into a return air course, into which the stream of fatal choke-damp was drawn, leaving all beyond that point so far clear of the deadly gas. Several, however, in their anxiety to escape had run past this point, unconscious of their danger, and falling amidst the fumes, in a few minutes, without a struggle, quietly slept the sleep of death.

Some of the deputies—i.e. officials—seeing that escape by the main line was at that moment hopeless, led the survivors into a branch line away from it, and placed them between two doors, where they were likely to be safe from the choke-damp if it still came

forward. In this narrow space, hemmed in on every side, they sat down with heavy hearts and sad forebodings to await deliverance or death. Brothers drew together, fathers and sons sat down in groups. One man—a local preacher—had found the dead body of his boy and carried it to where they sat, fondly hoping there might still be life; but the spirit had fled, and the dead lay beside the living, none knowing how many minutes might elapse till all were so laid side by side. Words for some time were few, as in this sad fellowship of feeling, hoping and fearing, they sat down to think of home and friends, of death and God.

In the midst of their suspense the atmosphere became close and oppressive from so large a number being gathered in so small a space; a feeling of drowsiness came over some, and the worst fears began to prevail. One good man—a local preacher—exhorting them all to look to Christ and God, knelt down and led them in prayer; another followed, praying that if it pleased God their lives might yet be spared and their deliverance speedily realized.

After prayer, Fairley, a class-leader, with another man, ventured out to see if there were any signs of change, and to their great joy found the air becoming purer. A short distance onward they came to the dead bodies of those who had fallen in the choke-damp, and among the rest poor Fairley saw his youngest boy. His features were calm and undisturbed, as if he only slept; but the father knew too truly it was the sleep of death. With crushed hopes

and a bleeding heart Fairley, with his mate, pressed forward till they reached a point where the force of the blast had been fearfully destructive. The wreck of broken tubs, timber, and mangled bodies afforded too sad evidence of its terrible power. On one side lay the already swollen body of a horse, and close by, that of his now headless driver. Then the most appalling sight of all to poor Fairley met his view. The burnt and shattered remains of *another* son lay there, close by his post of duty; and in a sheltered spot by the side of the way lay his clothes and his open Testament, with the corner of the leaf turned down on the words: 'Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing.'

Poor Ned, an active, sharp, intelligent young man, had only a few weeks before given himself to God. The father, with his family, formed the principal part of the chapel choir, and after the Sunday service Ned and Billy had taken part in their last united family song of praise at home. Before Monday morning dawned they had both joined with the redeemed in that everlasting song which knows no discord, and that long repose which no startling blasts can disturb.

The distracted father lifted up his heart to God for help, and, as he said, 'help was given,' for, dark and deep as the sorrow was, the cloud had still a fringe of light. He remembered the words in the book on which his eye had rested, the godly lives of the lads, their enjoyment of the Sabbath services the day before, and their last family song of praise on

the Sunday night. He knew their blessedness was assured, for, as he said, 'The Lord, when He came, had found them so doing.'

At length the last of the living was brought up, and the hopes of those still waiting for their own were extinguished as they knew that none but the dead remained, and realized too surely the painful truth that theirs were gone.

Slowly and sadly the crowds dispersed as the last of the dead were brought up. The sun was setting; darkness soon followed; the stars again shone brightly; the pit-head lamp again sent forth its clouds of smoke and its flickering glare on the mouth of the now more gloomy shaft, down which twenty-six precious lives had been blotted out, darkening many homes, saddening many hearts, and leaving family circles changed for ever. And for me a strangely broken sleep, with startling dreams, in which the pit again seemed firing and the earth again shaking, followed 'my last day down the pit.'

At this time a providential opening came for me to enter upon business life. The beginning was small, but I had a powerful and all-wise Partner, whose blessing 'maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it.' I was gradually led on, until the hard toil of early days was exchanged for comfort and a degree of success.

CHAPTER VII

My Bible and My Books

IN 1836 the British and Foreign Bible Society began to hold meetings and form committees in our neighbourhood to spread the Scriptures. Two girls were appointed to take the books round in a clothes-basket, and to collect the money on the pay-Monday, a few coppers at a time.

I carried milk from the farm for some of our neighbours, and was rewarded with a halfpenny or a penny from each weekly. These I saved and paid to the collectors, till I had paid my six-and-eightpence and received my Bible. (A copy of the same size and in larger print can be had to-day for half-a-crown.) It lies on my library table still, after serving me for seventy-six years. Some of the leaves are loose, but the binding is uninjured. When I removed into my present residence it was the last thing to leave the old home, and it was carried in my hand as my wife and I walked from the house where we had spent thirty years together, to the new home where we have now spent over twenty years. Other Bibles have been bought and come into use for purposes of study, but the old leather-backed volume is still dear to my heart and associated with memories of many joys and griefs.

Another Bible which I have is blackened and marked by fire, the corners and edges burned away; and for years after it came into my possession it retained the smell of the explosion which I have described in my 'Last Day Down the Pit,' and in which its owner met his death.

Many books illustrative of Bible truths—historical, geographical, expository, and theological—have been acquired, and have served to enrich my mind and heart and to equip me for the work I have endeavoured to do. For seventy years my favourite study has been the history and topography of the Holy Land. I have elsewhere recorded my unshakeable conviction that the life and person of the Lord Jesus Christ should form the supreme subject of Sunday-school teaching. Whatever aids the teacher in the understanding and realization of that subject should be eagerly sought and utilized.

The first book I bought on Bible lands was written by a Cumberland farmer named John Lowthian. He became interested in the subject, sold his farm and stock, and visited Palestine. On his return, the notes of his journey were published in a small volume. I bought it with my last shilling, and I felt, on reading it, as though I had found a fortune. It served the purpose of setting my mind on a definite and fruitful line of study. Other books on the same subject followed: Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, *The Land and the Book*, Gadsby's *Wanderings*, all were eagerly read and assimilated. I joined the Palestine Explora-

tion Society soon after its formation, and that subject is still full of intense interest for me.

When I was a boy the dictionary was often mentioned as a court of final appeal as to the meaning of terms in dispute, so I came to regard it as the repository of all knowledge, and I decided to save up my cash for the purpose of buying a dictionary. After many weeks I had the money ready, and on a pay-Saturday morning my father, my brother, and I set off on foot for Newcastle. As we descended the steep and narrow Bottle Bank at Gateshead I saw a book-shop, and at once entered. It is still a book-shop, carried on by the same family as then. There I bought a copy of Walker's Dictionary, which was wrapped in paper and tied up. Then we went on over the old stone bridge into Newcastle to view the wonders of 'the town.'

On the way home I ran on in front of the others, and at the top of the bank near Wrekenton I sat on a fragment of blue shap granite—a relic of the ice age—to examine my purchase. The string was loosed, the paper stripped off, and the book opened. How my heart sank as I saw long lists of words—words, only words. When my father and brother came up I was in tears. 'Wey, what's the matter, hinney?' was the kindly inquiry. 'It nowt but a big spellin'-beuk,' I quavered. My disappointment was bitter, but as I learnt to use the book I began to appreciate its value, and it still stands on my shelves, having well served its day and generation.

On another Saturday I walked the twelve miles to Newcastle before eight in the morning. I breakfasted on food purchased in the New Market, and when the bookstalls were opened I went round to scan their contents. At last I happened upon a series of novels at two shillings each, and bought six of them for eleven shillings. These were eagerly perused, and the tales were told again and again on the three-mile walk to the pit on the dark winter mornings.

When these books had been read often enough to have lost their freshness I walked to Easington Lane, and at the shop of Tommy Knaggs exchanged them for two calf-bound volumes of Robertson's *History of Ancient Greece.* These introduced me to an entirely new world. The literature, art, poetry, and history of Greece rose before me, and the great names which adorn her records became familiar in our mouths. Not till I was seventy-one years of age, however, was I able to visit Athens and Palestine, much as I desired to do so through all the intervening years.

Many authors have contributed to my bookshelves, but those most prized have been concerned with the things of eternal life, and particularly with the work of God by the instrumentality of the Methodist Church.

CHAPTER VIII

Sunday-school Work Then and Now

ON Saturday nights, after my six days' work was done, I put on my second-best suit and, with a tin candlestick and some candle-ends provided by my mother and my aunt Bessy, I went up to the chapel. There I spent my whole evening ruling copybooks and writing headings for the writing-lessons in the Sunday school on the following day. I was the best penman in the village, and at the age of sixteen was appointed to the writing-class.

In those days the provision for education was of the scantiest amount, and of a very inferior kind. He was a lucky lad whose school-days extended to his tenth birthday, most of us being required, under pressure of hard necessity, to contribute our quota to the family income before that age. Thus the Sunday school became a place for instruction in the ordinary subjects of reading, spelling, and writing, regular provision being made for these subjects. My own father and mother received all the education they ever had in the Methodist Sunday school, and multitudes of other persons at that time owed all they ever learned to the unselfish efforts of those a little better equipped than the general mass of the mining population.

In 1849 I began a week-night Bible-class, in which the Scripture narratives were studied and illustrated. The constant use of the map and the endeavour to familiarize the children with the Eastern customs were of the greatest service to myself as well as to the members of the class. But above all, the endeavour was to render the narratives into such language and with such explanations as would lay hold on the imagination and convince the understanding of the historical truth of the stories. And in no case were the principles of conduct involved overlooked or neglected. For sixty years this class went on, and out of it have gone many Sunday-school teachers, class-leaders, local preachers, and ministers. The class was always kept in close relation with the ordinary Sunday-school work, and the preparation for the Sunday-school anniversary was always part of our duty.

The old type of anniversary services usually included special hymns with a florid musical setting, recitations of poetry—sentimental often rather than religious, dialogues utterly out of character with the personators, and sometimes a little space for a sermon. Very early in my work as a teacher the value of the opportunity thus presented to the teacher became clear to me, and I endeavoured to modify the prevailing practice by basing the anniversary preparation on the actual work of the school during the year. All irrelevant poems and recitations were shut out, all individual display was discouraged, and the class was

the unit with which we worked. Thus a certain definite portion of the life of Christ might be taken—say the first year of His ministry. The journeys of the Saviour were traced on the map, and the historical associations of each place visited were sought out from the Old Testament. Every indication of local characteristics was dealt with and verified from modern works of travel. Each narrative was memorized by one or other of the classes, and after it had been recited, questions on the matter were put to the whole body of children. When the doctrinal truths and matters of conduct had been educed the Catechism was drawn upon for definition, and the hymn-book supplied some pithy, pregnant verses which embodied the teaching of the whole story. This formed part of each service on the anniversary day, but the preacher was never prevented from adequately presenting his message at the morning and evening services. By this method the annual children's day became a most powerful agent in stamping on the memory and understanding facts, principles, and doctrines of the utmost importance and of permanent value. The results were remarkable in many instances.

It must not be imagined that the teachers were in any way out of the common run. An intelligent following of the course marked out was the main thing aimed at, and for many years the Sunday school of which I was superintendent was conducted thus with marked success.

The average school life is three years, of which one-third is lost by absence; so that about a hundred hours is all we have in which to impress the child's heart with all those truths which are to guide it through life and lead it into the Church of Christ. Plainly, we cannot in that time go from Genesis to Revelation. How, then, can we use the period to the greatest advantage? Not on Old Testament study, important as it is; but as it was in prophecy and in history preparatory to the Christ of the New Testament, let us go to that for our field. AND LET US SINK OUR SHAFT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROYALTY. The life of Christ, His teaching, His death, His resurrection—these are our true subjects. In these is salvation, and all other biblical subjects are subordinate and subsidiary to this, the great matter of all evangelical religious teaching.

CHAPTER IX

Finger Texts

IN the course of the many years of my association with Sunday-school work in this northern mining district it has been my privilege on many occasions to address gatherings of parents and children at various Sunday-school anniversaries. In so doing, my object was always to impress the minds and hearts of the children rather than to appeal directly to the parents, who are assembled not so much to hear the preacher as to delight in their bairns' contributions to the exercises of the day.

Some subjects have proved to be very acceptable to both parents and children, as shown by the way in which the lessons taught have been kept in memory and carried into practice by many of my hearers, and also by the frequent reference to such addresses in letters from many lands and in conversation with many people of widely varied temperament and circumstances. An address on 'Birds and Flowers' was very useful. Based on the passages concerning the value of two sparrows and the glory of the lilies, it conveyed by modern instances of a most homely kind the lessons of the text. Years after, a lady who heard the address in Brunswick Place Chapel, Newcastle, inquired on meeting me, 'How are your aunt

Bessie and your grandmother getting on now?' 'You didn't know them,' I exclaimed. 'Oh yes,' she laughingly replied, 'they have been familiar friends of mine ever since you introduced them to us among the birds and flowers.'

The most useful of these addresses was founded on the text, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' It was suggested to me by an incident occurring in my own home when the shadow of death hung over it. My eldest son—a baby of twelve months—was brought into the room where his mother lay in the last stage of a long and exhausting illness. As he was placed by her side, she took up a little pocket Bible which had been her constant companion for years and placed it on the boy's arm, uttering the prayer that it might be to him as it had been to her, 'a lamp to his feet and a light to his path.' A few days later she entered into rest, and my son and myself were left lonely. But that scene remained in my thoughts while my own path was dark and difficult, and the Word became to me a bright light and a most effective lamp.

The address took shape in my mind years after, and the five principal words, 'Word, light, feet, lamp, path,' made excellent headings. The form in which a subject is presented to an audience is almost as important as the matter, especially when the audience consists of young people with fresh and plastic minds. It occurred to me to call for 'Left hands up,' and to ask the children to say one of the words while point-

ing to the fingers in turn. This aroused interest, and made an effective impression on their memories.

Being at Whitburn, near Sunderland, at one Sunday-school anniversary, I was asked by my dear friend Mr. Allison to talk to the fishermen and their families after tea on the Saturday night. He provided the tea, and a goodly number attended. On the Sunday morning I went to the Sunday school, as I had promised the children on the Saturday night, and took the finger text for my subject. The children relished it immensely.

The following year the same arrangements were made. As the fisherfolk were leaving, a young girl asked me, 'Please, sir, will you be at school in the morning?' 'Yes, my dear, I shall. But why do you want to know?' 'Because our Willie wants to see you,' she replied. 'Very well,' said I; 'tell Willie I shall look out for him.'

At the door of the school on the Sunday morning stood a smart little fellow in fisherman's costume—blue jersey and woollen cap all complete. 'Aa's here,' burst from his lips as I approached. 'I thought you were,' said I. 'But who are you?' 'Aa's Willie,' was the answer. 'Aa hae'd off,' he continued. 'What have you off?' I inquired. 'Word, light, feet, lamp, path,' he repeated, touching a finger at each word. 'Why, where did you get that, Willie?' 'Ye gov us that,' he answered. 'How do you remember it?' I asked. 'W'y, aa wesh my hands three times ivrey day, an' when aa rub my thumb aa says "word," an'

when aa rub this finger aa says "light," an' "feet," an' "lamp," an' "path." An' when aa dry them aa say'd again, an' that's the way I think on.'

At one meeting of the Newcastle Synod, four men spoke to me of the abiding impression made on their minds in childhood by this address and the finger exercise.

A similar device was useful in teaching the phrase, 'Jesus died for me.' The left hand, with fingers extended, was raised, and J-E-S-U-S was spelt out on the five digits. The thumb was put down, and on the four was spelt D-I-E-D. Another finger was closed down, and F-O-R was spelt. M-E was the last word, and the child pointed to his own bosom as he finished the spelling.

It was all very simple, and some may say childish, but its value is proved by the effect produced; and when the child is encouraged to repeat these or similar passages as part of his devotional exercises, the words become engraved in the memory ineffaceably. A mind stored with great passages of Scripture and noble hymns, all illuminated by the teaching given on the subjects, is a priceless possession; for though the life may be careless and sinful, yet there is material which, recalled to mind by the Holy Spirit, gives an opportunity to the evangelist or the visitor which not infrequently leads to a conviction of the truths of religion and submission to the easy yoke and light burden of Christ's service.

CHAPTER X

My First Visit to London

DURING the first half of the nineteenth century, when travelling by rail was still comparatively in its infancy, a visit to London was regarded by Northern working men as quite the event of a lifetime. If one happened to live in a village where, from the narrow environment of life, 'everybody knows what everybody else is doing,' it was, if not an event in the history of the place, at least a matter of interest to the villagers generally, as I found in 1851, when arranging to visit the great city and the International Exhibition then being held in Hyde Park.

No one residing in the village had ever been so far from home. 'Cheap trips' and 'Saturday excursions,' with the means of utilizing them by the working classes, were still far away 'in the good time coming.' Though twenty-three years of age, I had never been more than twelve miles from the place where I was born, so that the expedition was to me not only a matter of pleasing anticipation, but formed the dawn of a new era in my life. I had been accustomed from my boyhood to long hours of labour, and few books had come within my reach, so that my reading had necessarily been limited; yet having read snatches of the history of England and of the 'Reformation' with the 'Days of Queen Mary,' the story of the

Spanish Armada, the life of John Wesley and his Works, with the story of 'The Foundery' and of 'City Road Chapel,' there was enough to whet the appetite for seeing places and things of general historic interest.

Before leaving home a programme was duly prepared of what I most desired to see. A day or two before I started, friends and neighbours, with the usual freedom of village life, looked in to say 'good-bye,' one of them adding as a well-meant caution, 'Noo hinney, beware of the Lunnon sharpers, an' keep thi pockets buttoned an' thi mouth shut, for they tell me they'll take the teeth out of a man's heed ef they're lowse.' Calling to see another old friend, whom it was always a pleasure to meet, I found him sitting at ease with his feet on the fender, a short cutty pipe in his mouth, and a cloud of smoke round his head, a picture of contentment. 'Well,' he said, 'I hear ye gannen to Lunnon. Of course you'll call to see the Mission House, an' shake hands wi' the secretaries, an' see what relics they've got from the mission field; an' you'll call at the Book-Room in City Road, an' also at City Road Chapel, an' Wesley's house, an' see the room he died in, an' his grave, an' the graves of Benson, Watson, and Dr. Clarke. You know aw hev the Doctor's Commentary in six volumes, which aw worked hard for, an' aw sometimes think he was almost inspired. He was one of the wisest men; but the wisest men sometimes make mistakes, an' aw think the only point in which the

Doctor was mistaken was aboot smokin' '; and as another cloud arose he added, 'Aw think he was a bit out at sea on that point, for aw like my pipe. Now, write to me after ye've seen them places.' Remembering his request, I wrote my letter partly on Watson's tombstone and partly on Dr. Clarke's, finishing it on that of John Wesley, and enclosing a few blades of grass from each grave, sent it on to my friend at Penshaw, in the county of Durham, where, in his hands, it rendered service in the Sunday school and the class-meeting, as well as with his favourite friends.

On my return there was much to tell and explain which he greatly enjoyed. Two years after, my dear old friend was crushed to death in the mine, leaving his wife and family to fight the battle of life, which they did faithfully and well. Thirty-three years after his death I called at the old place to see one of his daughters, who, with her husband, had for years been the mainstay of the Penshaw Society as her father had been before her. She showed me the first volume of Clarke's Commentary, with the letter, sent from City Road thirty-five years before, pinned on the title-page just where he had placed it. 'Now,' she said, 'it is there just as he pinned it. My mother would never allow it to be touched. It is just as he left it, and as it might fall into the hands of those who do not know its history, if you care to take it, do so now.' On drawing the pin which he placed there thirty-five years before, I found the blades of

grass still inside. In company with his daughter I visited the old chapel where he worshipped, and his grave only a few yards away over the wall. For the moment I was living the old times over again, the memories of which were vividly before me, revived by the interesting relic of the past.

About seven years after, his grandson, who, with his mother, still maintained the family interest in the society, wrote asking me to take a Sunday's service once more in the old place, and also requesting me to take the letter which I had sent to his grandfather, as he would like to see it. I went, and left him the letter to retain in the family.

This incident forms an interesting memory by the way. I travelled to London, on the occasion referred to, by the first excursion train from the North of England. Our excursion, being under the management of two Sunderland gentlemen, who had arranged with the N.E.R. Company, the train started from Sunderland at 3 a.m. and reached King's Cross at 9 p.m. On my last visit to London, a few months ago, I did the journey from and to Durham between 8.4 a.m. and 10.20 p.m.

Having utilized my time in the great city to the best advantage, I went the day before leaving to see Hampton Court, being interested in its historical associations; and after seeing through the palace, with its beautiful gardens and its famous vine, I sat down for a few minutes' meditation. A well-dressed gentleman came and sat on the same seat. 'I think,

sir,' he said, ' you are not a London man ; at least, I judge so from your walk.' ' No, sir,' I replied, ' I come from the county of Durham.' ' Yes, I thought so. You have the gait peculiar to the North. Then you come from the coal-field?' ' Yes, sir.' ' Well, I understand the miners of the North are a strange class of people—rough, uncultivated, with a good deal of the savage about them. They are great eaters and drinkers and gamblers, and both sexes are gaudily dressed on Sundays. The women are to be seen on the baking-day with their short-sleeved dresses showing their brawny arms, as at the public oven they pass in and out loaves of a size that would satisfy a man's appetite for a week. London will be a great sight for you. Now, what have you seen?' ' Oh,' I said , ' I went to the British Museum to see the original of Magna Charta, some letters of Sir Isaac Newton, some statuary brought from Athens, and the Greek and Egyptian relics, with much more than I can describe. I have also been at Smithfield, St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery, the Tower, and Greenwich Hospital, with Wesley's Chapel at City Road, and knowing something of the history of this place I am finishing up here.' ' Well,' he said, ' you have made the most of your time. Might I ask what you are in business?' ' O sir,' I said, looking steadily at him, ' it is my lot to be one of those rough, uncultivated, savage miners of which you spoke as the most brutal of Her Majesty's subjects.'

I have never seen a man whose face so flushed as his, or one in more difficulty to reply, till in somewhat broken words he stammered out, 'But—but you are not a miner?' 'Yes, sir,' I said; 'it was my lot to go to work in the mine from nine years of age up to a few months ago, when I narrowly escaped in a great explosion in which twenty-six lives were lost, and have now turned to seek a living in some other way.' 'Well,' he said, 'I am very much surprised to find myself so far mistaken.' 'Oh,' I said, 'you have read descriptions given in the *Saturday Magazine*, the writer of which has evidently suffered from one of those squints which sees nothing very clearly, and always on the wrong side of things.'

We parted good friends, and I had a story to tell on my return.

CHAPTER XI

'It'll be All Right at Last'

AT a colliery village which I often visited as a local preacher and in connexion with Sunday-school work, a young lad in his teens lived with his sister. Their parents were dead. They were both good, and blessed with more than ordinary intelligence. They were diligent in all religious service, and though Fred was now and then laughed at by the other lads for his pious talk, they respected him, and it became a custom to question him about his religion and his Bible. Fred often had an opportunity in this way of giving a kindly word of counsel, which almost invariably ended with 'It'll be all right at last.'

One morning, as the miners were separating for their work in the interior of the mine, one man, who often joked with Fred about his religion, put some puzzling question, to which Fred's reply was, 'It'll be all right at last, Tom.' They had not been more than one hour at work when a heavy fall of stone came down in the place where Fred was working, and buried the whole of his body up to the head and neck. The man who had joked with him heard the fall, and was the first to reach him. On seeing his position he said, 'I'm afraid ah canna get thoo oot,' and repeated the words, 'Poor Fred!' and Fred responded: 'Eh,

Tom, it is all right at last.' Help was soon found, but some time passed before he could be released; and though he was still living, the end was evidently near. When he was borne home his sister was in the deepest distress. Holding out his hand he tried to comfort her, his last words being, 'It's all right at last.' Thus he passed away to realize the truth of his oft-repeated conclusion. He was held in the highest respect by those around him, and his end under such circumstances produced a very deep impression in many homes.

I have seen, during a long life in a colliery village and surrounding places, many painfully interesting scenes where accidents have occurred. One of my best Bible-class boys was killed in the mine. He was always ready and pleased to do anything for me. One Sunday night I asked him to call me early the following morning, as I was leaving for a holiday that day. He came, and we bade each other good-morning. A few hours after that last 'Good-morning' poor John was badly crushed in the mine and was brought home, nobody being aware that his injuries were so severe. In a few hours he unexpectedly passed away, and as I was travelling from place to place I received no message till, returning at the latter end of the week, I found that poor John had passed away and been laid to rest without my having the opportunity of another word with him. He was a good, intelligent, thoughtful lad, with much Scripture truth fixed on his mind. His parents felt very

keenly the sudden, unexpected loss of their first-born.

All the younger members of the family continued in my Bible-class till they were eighteen or twenty years of age and had entered into the ordinary business engagements of life. One of the younger of these, who was also one of the most reliable of my Bible-class scholars, many years after the death of his brother was caught by the wagons at the colliery. I was at once sent for, and, reaching the house, found that there was no hope of his life being spared. During the suspense of waiting for the doctor, I tried to improve the opportunity by pointing him to Christ. When the doctor came he shook his head and said it was only a question of an hour or two. His parents were in an adjoining room during the doctor's examination, and as he left, poor Tom looked up to me and said with surprising firmness of tone, 'Am I going to die?' I said, 'I am afraid you are, Tom.' Then he said, 'Will you pray with me again?' After a short prayer, he said, 'You might ask my father and mother to come in now.' I said, 'Now, you must try to keep a brave heart and say as little as you can to distress your father and mother.' He said, 'I will try,' and when they came in the brave little hero acted with great firmness in keeping his feelings under, for his mother's sake. In a few minutes it was necessary for me to retire, and Tom said, 'It is Bible-class night; you will have to go, I am afraid.' I said, 'No, Tom, I cannot leave you.' He said, 'Then pray again.' Another brief prayer was uttered,

and he said, 'There, now!' and repeated two verses of 'Jesu, Lover of my soul.' When he finished he said, 'I cannot see you now; let me feel your hand'; and attempting to grasp it, he said, 'I am going to sleep; good-bye,' and so he gently slept into final rest. I have witnessed many touching scenes, but was never more impressed with the importance and value of early religious instruction than in this instance. Another teacher in the Sunday school, who had not had large experience, said, 'Well, if I never see any other results than those I have seen to-day of the value of Sunday-school work, I will still labour on cheerfully to the end.'

Many years have passed away since then, and Tom's mother still lives with her two daughters. The history of the past often formed a matter of conversation with us. The missionary collecting-book which the oldest boy used has passed through the hands of all the members of the family, and is now in those of their children. It has been in the family for more than half-a-century, and has been successfully worked with substantial results every year.

CHAPTER XII

The Origin of Dora Greenwell's Poem, 'The Pitman to His Wife'

IN 1865 we were holding a bazaar in the village of Sherburn, in aid of our chapel funds. The late T. C. Thompson, Esq., then residing at Sherburn Hall, having a select party of guests who had little knowledge of miners and their families, kindly brought them to patronize our sale and gather some idea of the atmosphere and trend of colliery village life.

After a few minutes' survey of the work on the stalls they were not slow in expressing their agreeable surprise at what they saw and heard, and spoke approvingly of the needlework and the tastefully arranged materials offered for sale.

Without our knowing who our visitors were, their questions on various points were answered. One lady, turning to me, said, 'Have you a good Methodist society here?' 'Yes, ma'am,' was the reply, 'a fairly active and earnest people, as you may judge from what you see.' The next question led to the following conversation: 'And have you any revivals?' said my questioner. 'Occasionally we have.' 'Then have you much excitement at these times?' 'That depends largely on the religious knowledge, as well as the past life and constitutional temperament, of

those who come under its influence. If they be very illiterate people of an emotional temperament, little or no religious training or mental discipline at home or in the Sunday school, they would show corresponding excitement, like that of the alarmed jailer at Philippi, who, suddenly made conscious of wrong-doing, with the fear of consequences, cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" If, however, they have been in some measure religiously trained and mentally disciplined, either in the family circle or otherwise, their decision for Christ and the feeling kindled would take a somewhat calmer and less demonstrative form, more like that of Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened in the quiet seclusion of the prayer-meeting held by the riverside.' 'Well,' said my questioner, 'that is a distinction in the process of conversion I have not heard drawn before, with an excellent scriptural illustration. But how do you judge of the spirituality of your revivals?' 'We do not judge by the mere excitement or enthusiasm of the service. These also vary according to the temperament and gifts of the workers or agencies employed. We judge of the genuineness of the work by the results. That is when bad people become good, and good people become better; when drunkards become sober, gamblers break off their gambling, and thoughtless people pay their debts.' 'Have you known such cases?' 'Yes,' I replied, pointing to one of the members of my class; 'you see that man with his back to us? I have known him

from his boyhood. He grew up in sin, and became an adept in every form of gambling known amongst miners. He was an expert in the pitch-and-toss school, card-playing, bowling, and cock-fighting when it was in vogue; but whilst he drank, he was not mischievous or negligent of his work. His drinking and gambling were chiefly practised on Saturdays and Sundays, and these habits were continued after his marriage. At length an old chum of his, who had for a few years been converted, and had engaged in preaching and revival services amongst his fellows, came to preach in the village where he lived. My friend here was induced by what he heard and saw to consider his position, and as he afterwards used to express it, "I thought on my way, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." His life at once was changed; and as his spiritual light increased, in addition to giving up the gambling and drink, he gradually cleared off his old scores, re-furnished his house, and has now his family Bible and family prayers. He is our chapelkeeper, and a diligent Sunday-school teacher, and all his family are being trained under such influences. We judge of the genuineness of revivals and conversions on the law set forth by the Saviour: "By their fruits ye shall know them."'

After further conversation on our class-meetings and other points in our church life and work showing a clear, high-toned spirituality and perception in the miner class-leader, the lady expressed her great

pleasure in the conversation, and we parted without my knowing who she really was. Mr. Thompson, on leaving, said, 'I am glad you had so good a talk with Miss Greenwell—Dora Greenwell, you know.'

I scarcely need say the surprise was very agreeable, and I was still more pleased a few weeks after on receiving, through Mr. Thompson, twenty-five copies of the following poem:—

THE PITMAN TO HIS WIFE.[1]

Sit ye down on the settle, here by me, I've got something to say to thee, wife:
I want to be a new sort of man, and to lead a new sort of life;
There's but little pleasure and little gain in spending the days I spend,
Just to work like a horse all the days of my life, and to die like a dog at the end.

For where's the profit and where's the good, if one once begins to think,
In making away with what little sense one had at first, through drink?
Or in spending one's time, and one's money too, with a lot of chaps that would go
To see one hanged, and like it as well as any other show?

And as to the pleasure that some folks find in cards or in pitch-and-toss,

[1] This poem is reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. Allenson & Co., Publishers.

The Origin of 'The Pitman to His Wife'

It's little they've ever brought to me, but only a vast of loss;
We'd be sure to light on some great dispute, and then, to set all right,
The shortest way was to argue it out in a regular stand-up fight.

I've got a will, dear wife, I say, I've got a will to be
A kinder father to my poor bairns, and a better man to thee,
And to leave off drinking, and swearing, and all, no matter what folks may say;
For I see what's the end of such things as these, and I know this is not the way.

You'll wonder to hear me talk like this, as I've never talked before;
But I've got a word in my heart, that has made it glad, yet has made it sore;
I've got a word like a fire in my heart, that will not let me be,
'Jesus, the Son of God, who loved, and who gave Himself for me.'

I've got a word like a sword in my heart, that has pierced it through and through.
When a message comes to a man from heaven, he needn't ask if it's true;
There's none on earth could frame such a tale, for as strange as the tale may be,
'Jesus, my Saviour, that Thou shouldst die for love of a man like me!'

Why, only think now! if it had been Peter, or blessed Paul,
Or John, who used to lean on His breast, one couldn't have wondered at all,
If He'd loved and He'd died for men like these, who loved Him so well; but, you see,
It was me that Jesus loved, wife! He gave Himself for me!

It was for me that Jesus died! for me, and a world of men
Just as sinful and just as slow to give back His love again;
He didn't wait till I came to Him, but He loved me at my worst:
He needn't ever have died for me if I could have loved Him first.

And couldst Thou love such a man as me, my Saviour? Then I'll take
More heed to this wandering soul of mine, if it's only for Thy sake:
For it wasn't that I might spend my days just in work, and in drink, and in strife,
That Jesus, the Son of God, has given His love and has given His life.

It wasn't that I might spend my life just as my life's been spent
That He's brought me so near to His mighty Cross, and has told me what it meant.
He doesn't need me to die for Him, He only asks me to live;

The Origin of 'The Pitman to His Wife'

There's nothing of mine that He wants but my heart,
and it's all that I've got to give.

I've got a Friend, dear wife; I say, I've got a
heavenly Friend,
That will show me where I go astray, and will help
me how to mend,
That'll make me kinder to my poor bairns, that'll
make me better to thee,
Jesus, the Son of God, who loved and who gave Him-
self for me.

On receiving the poem, I took a copy down to my friend and his wife and read it to them, as he sat smoking his pipe after coming home from the pit. On hearing it read, turning to his wife, he said, 'That's very like thou an' me, Hannah.' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'that's your photo in poetry.' 'Then that,' he said, 'is the photo of Mark Pratt and Hannah of Sherburn Colliery, by Dora Greenwell.'

Poor Mark! He met in my class for thirty-four years, and at the last meeting he attended the basis of our conversation happened to be:

> But Thou, belovèd Saviour, art all in all to me;
> And weakness will be power, when *leaning hard* on Thee.

One illustration of these words was given in the following story: A missionary's wife, after a hard day's work in a hot country, attended the closing service on a Sunday evening, having to sit on mats laid on the floor of the place of service. One of the native women, observing her weariness, went and sat beside her, saying, 'You are tired; lean against me.'

As the leaning was felt to be somewhat light, the woman said, '*Lean hard*, and if you lean as much as I love you, you will sit easy.' My good old friend, relishing the illustration, turned it to account in the few words he spoke.

A few days after an accident happened to him in the mine, which at the time was not deemed serious, but it laid hold on weak points left from former injuries and hastened the end. Every time I called during the last few days of his life, on asking how he was, the answer invariably began with, 'Leaning hard, sir! leaning hard,' and leaning hard he passed away —to use one of his oft-repeated phrases—'into the kind care and keeping of Him who careth for us.'

Gems are sometimes to be found in colliery villages, and even poets may find subjects worthy of their pen.

CHAPTER XIII

'Good-morning, Sir!'

ON a beautiful Sunday morning in the spring of 1860 I left home between six and seven o'clock, having nine miles to walk to my appointment as local preacher for the day at Chester-le-Street. Being familiar with every inch of the road, with its beautiful scenery and historic associations, I started early to do it leisurely and to revive the cherished memories of earlier days.

Some three hundred yards away from my door, however, I met in a narrow lane a man who had been out all night drinking. His walk was slow and 'wobbly.' His clothes were soiled by contact with road and hedge-side, and one of his eyes showed signs of violent contact with something hard.

On coming up to him, I said, 'Good-morning, sir! Here is a bright, beautiful morning.' Without raising his head or looking up, he grumbled out in a low, heavy tone, 'Good-morning,' and as I passed on my way I said, 'Yes! it is indeed a fine morning.'

From this point I give the sequel as I heard it from his own lips twenty-five years after, when he stood up to move a vote of thanks to me after one of my lectures.

'I have known the lecturer,' he said 'a long time.

My first acquaintance with him was made early on a Sunday morning. I had been out drinking all night, and from a bit scuffle I had with another man as daft as me, one of my eyes was blackened. I was staggering my way home to get out of sight before the neighbours were astir, when I saw him coming down the lane. I thought I would rather have seen somebody else, but thinking he would pass me without notice, I staggered on. When we met, he said in a free, cheerful tone, "Good-morning, sir! It is a beautiful morning"; and without looking at him, I grunted out "Good-morning." "Yes," he said, "it is indeed a fine morning," and went on his way. As I looked after him, wondering what had led him to speak so kindly to me, though I was in such a mess, I said to myself, "Yes! it is a good morning, a fine morning to him. He'll have been in bed all night, and have had prayer with his wife before leaving, and now he's off to preach somewhere. The folks will be glad to see him, and he'll come home all right to-night. Aye! it's a good morning for him." Then I thought, "I too will have my good morning and all." On reaching home,' he continued, 'my wife let off on me, but I quietly rolled into bed without a word, and looking out from behind the curtains, I thought, "Here am I, making my home more like a hell for my wife and family." But in the midst of her scolding, that "Good-morning, sir," was sounding like music in a storm. That night I found my way to the preaching-service held in an old granary which had

no window, for then there was no chapel. I got in behind the door, where nobody could see my black eye but where I saw and felt my own sinfulness. Then next morning at the pit, at every moment amidst all the noise and clatter of wagons and machinery, "Good-morning, sir! A beautiful morning," was the strongest, clearest sound. I went to class that night, and for twenty-five years now I have been enjoying "Good-mornings," aye, and for twenty-four years a local preacher's "Good-mornings" as well. My wife and family have "Good-mornings" too, and are all now on the way to heaven.'

After nearly forty years of a local preacher's 'Good-mornings' and a life of Christian usefulness, he died, leaving his sons following in his footsteps.

CHAPTER XIV

'Them Horses!'

IN a little colliery village chapel, where things were working somewhat quietly, though good ordinary service was being done, one of the friends proposed at a leaders' meeting that some special services might be held with advantage.

Another said, 'We had better keep to the ordinary line, like the railway people. Keep to your time-table, and work your system well.'

'Yes,' replied the other, 'and yet the railway people do run a "special" whenever they get the chance, and we might try a "special" and secure outside passengers who do not always book with us.'

The matter was agreed upon, and a preacher's services secured. The subjects upon which he was to preach each night in the week were duly announced. On the first night the preacher borrowed a railway porter's bell, and went ringing along the rows of the village. As the people turned out of their houses, thinking there was something particular the matter, he announced special services in the Methodist chapel. 'We invite you to join us, and share in the blessedness we ourselves enjoy.'

One working man, who had in his boyhood been a Sunday scholar, heard the ringing of the bell and

the announcement which followed. For many years he had not entered a place of worship; the public-house was his place of general resort. From drinking he had been drawn into gambling. One of the hymns sung in the street drew his attention; the words were those he had often sung in Sunday school in his boyhood, and awakened thoughts of his father's life and death. He ventured that night to the service. Under the sermon he was powerfully convinced of sin. Seeing he was affected I spoke to him, saying, 'John, twenty years ago you promised your father, as he lay dying, that you would meet him in heaven. Have you started for it yet?'

'No,' he replied; 'I would like to be right, but I cannot decide now.'

The night following he was again drawn to hear the preacher. In the meantime I heard that he had a bet on two horses which were to run the week following. In conversation with a chum of his, he said, 'I would have gone into the inquiry-room but for *them horses*.'

After the service I said to him, 'John, do not lose your soul and waste your life for "them horses."'

He was surprised to find that I knew the hindrance. On being urged to contrast the interests at stake, he said, 'I'll give them up and come,' which he did.

His decision for Christ was clear, intelligent, and resolute. Of him it might literally be said, 'I have

thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies.'

It was soon known through the village that he had been converted. He attended chapel night after night whilst the services were being held. Knowing the temptations to which he would be subject from his old companions at the end of the week, a few thoughtful, good men arranged, without his knowledge, to keep him company during his vacant time on the Saturday night and Sunday. He attended three services at chapel on the Sunday, including Sunday school, and being impressed with the lesson for the day in school, he asked a friend for the *Teacher's Magazine*, from which he copied notes, carrying them in his work-jacket pocket.

On the Tuesday night following I called for him on the way to the class-meeting. He was upstairs, and on hearing my voice came down. He said, 'I'm so glad you've come; I have had a struggle. I've had word to-day that them two horses have won, and I was to go and draw the money. If I go I know what'll follow. I have been praying over it for the last hour, and I have decided to let horses and bets all go rather than risk my soul.'

On returning from chapel after a profitable service we had further conversation on spiritual things, in which he expressed himself as so thankful to God for his conquest over 'them bets and horses.'

The following afternoon a messenger came in breathless haste, saying, 'Come at once; poor Jack

has been caught by the engine, and there seems little hope of his life.'

In a few minutes I was walking by his side as he was borne along on a stretcher. His eyes were closed, and a deathly pallor spread over his face. On hearing my voice he opened his eyes, lifted his hand to mine, and said, 'Oh, what a mercy that God has converted my soul! If this had happened a fortnight since, I was a lost man. I am dying, but through the mercy of God I am saved. Will you go on and break it gently to my wife, and get my poor bairns kept on at Sunday school, and tell them all about me—that I want them to be good and meet me in heaven?'

On examination, the doctor found the body was sorely mangled, and said there was no hope. The night was spent in terrible suffering, during which he earnestly prayed for patience and grace to endure, and often expressed his sense of God's favour and his hope of heaven, exclaiming at one time:

> 'Oh, what are all my sufferings here
> If, Lord, Thou count me meet
> With that enraptured host to appear
> And worship at Thy feet?'

His brother, whose place John was taking when the accident occurred, came in during the night. He said, 'O John, if I had only been at my own post! It wouldn't have mattered for me so much; I have neither wife nor children.'

Looking up, he said, 'Bill, hinney, it's better as it is; the Lord has had mercy upon me, and saved me,

but thoo hasn't torned tiv Him yet. Bill, hinney, He's gi'en thee time; prepare to meet me in heaven. Promise me, Bill.'

'I'll try ti meet tha, Jack, in heaven,' said his brother.

It was deeply touching to see his solicitude for his wife and children, and for the conversion of his friends, and very interesting to find how the old Bible truths, learnt in childhood, and still hid in the cells of memory, were recalled by the Holy Spirit. Fitting and beautiful quotations from Bible and hymn-book fell from his lips from time to time. At last, bidding us all good-bye, he said, 'I'm goin'; I'll be at Home in a short time now,' and passed quietly away, giving evidence of true conversion and a sure hope of eternal life.

Many years ago the writer told the story of 'them horses' to the late Rev. Thomas Champness, who often used it with telling effect in his services both in this country and America, in which it brought forth fruits after its own kind.

CHAPTER XV

A Rousing Preacher

HE was a *local preacher*, a man of grit, physically and mentally; low in stature, yet with a well-formed head which Nature had only covered a little at the sides. With his piercing eyes, from the rapid glances of which few of his hearers could escape, he presented a somewhat striking appearance in the pulpit. Having a good vocabulary, into which he often threw the northern pitman's vernacular with effect, coupled with a ready utterance and an intense earnestness in every part of the service, he at once attracted the attention of his hearers, and kept it to the end; so that whenever Newark Featonby was 'planned' in the colliery villages of Durham, there was sure to be a good congregation and a lively time. And even in a Sunday afternoon service there was no chance of an after-dinner nap in the corner of your pew so long as the preacher was on his legs; for he certainly was, as he sometimes described himself, 'a queer compound of nature and grace' which neither art nor education had interfered to spoil.

At the early age of seven he was taken to work in a coal-mine where the hours of labour were cruelly long. Boys then worked sixteen hours a day, and generally six days in the week; so that he had no education but what he received in the Methodist

Sunday school, in a colliery village, about a mile distant from his home. In that Sunday school he and his brothers learned to read, with some little assistance from their parents. Their home, though only a miner's low, red-tiled cottage, with a rough, red-brick floor, affording very limited accommodation, was yet *home* in the best and truest sense of that good old English word; and whilst the family fare was very scanty—for the times were hard—and the daily toil in the pit was long and dreary, yet the cheerful glow of a plain, common-sense, practical godliness, in which honesty, cleanliness, and thrift were developed, made that humble home to its inmates the happiest, cheeriest spot upon earth. When the Sabbath came round, bringing rest from toil, Sunday clothes, the Sunday dinner, and the family attendance at the services of God's house, it was in every sense to these toilers in the mine 'the brightest day of all the seven.'

His own graphic description of his childhood and home training, given in addressing parents at a Sunday-school anniversary, was something to hear; given, however, with touches of humour and a pathos of filial affection which cannot be put on paper, but under which his spell-bound audiences saw and felt how deeply that home-life was engraven on his memory, and how the mother's influence had moulded the man.

'Ye mothers,' said he, 'listen. When aw was a very little boy—and ye can see for yersels that aw

never was a big 'un—aw used to go to the pit at two o'clock in the morning, and for sixteen dreary hours aw was knocked about, frae wig to wag, sometimes scrapin' a big patch of skin off my shins, and then in the gloomy light of a farthing candle, running my head against the props, till the little brains aw had seemed to have been joggled so loose that ye dinnat need to wonder aw should be so scattered in my preaching and not able to talk "consecutively," as the big folks say; ye see, that word is a cramper to us plain people, but it sets them off a bit, and they are welcome to it. Well, aw wanted to tell ye that when aw used to waddle home at nights frae the pit, tired and weary, and as hungry as if aw'd been fasting forty days and nights in the wilderness, and as black as a nigger, but without the polish, the comely face of my good, canny mother was to me the brightest thing in creation, and her smile was the very sunshine of my life; and after the din and discordant noise in the pit, her gentle voice fell upon my ears in sounds as sweet as ever fell from David's harp. When the dinner was over, and the washing was done, and a little bit of family talk, aw knelt at her feet and laid my head on her knee to "say my prayers." First the "Lord's Prayer," followed by "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Then some questions, with answers, she taught me:—

Question: Who made you? Answer: God.
Question: Who redeemed you? Answer: Jesus Christ.
Question: Who sanctified you? Answer: The Holy Ghost.

Question : How many Gods are there? Answer : One.
Question : How many Persons? Answer : Three.
Question : Which be they? Answer : God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

'After the prayer came the mother's kiss, then the tumble into bed, and the weary little limbs stretched out, whilst the eyelids closed without an effort, and in five minutes aw was in a sounder, sweeter sleep than Solomon ever knew or ever could describe.

'Now,' he continued, 'there are two points in that picture aw want ye to see. The first is the bairn on his knees saying his prayers, and the mother taking care that all the words are carefully and seriously said. You know the Psalmist says: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." But dinnat ye think the angel in such a case would slip into the house a bit, and watch with special interest that mother teaching her child to pray, and pointing him to Christ and heaven and God? "For are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?" And my mother was an heir, and aw was an heir, as surely as the words were written. Aye, and dinnat ye think that bairn on his knees, on the hard brick floor in that pitman's cottage, saying his prayers after his mother, was as interesting and beautiful a sight to the angels and to Jesus as George the Third was, kneeling on his velvet cushion in the Chapel Royal at Windsor, saying his prayers after his chaplain?

'Now, mothers, keep up that good old-fashioned practice of teaching them to say their prayers. There's a fortune in it for yersels and yer bairns which the breaking of banks can never touch and the changes of life can never affect. It is the bairns' own inheritance, and it is your business to see that they get their rights.

'Then the other point in that picture is the sound theology of my mother's teaching. Ye see, she wasn't one of these hair-splitting theological folk, dividing and sub-dividing as they call it, tearing the truth up into shreds and threads till there wasn't as much left as a spider's faith could hang upon; but she gave me these great, big, grand old truths just as she found them in the Bible. Now, some folks will turn up their nose with a sneer at that, and some, with a smile of pity at her simplicity, will say, "No doubt she meant well, poor body; but the idea of talking or teaching a child such things, as if a mere bairn could take such truths in!" O ye wise men of Gotham! "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." Cannot ye see, if the bairn couldn't take the truths in, *the truths could take the bairn in?* And his mother was doing her best to help him in. And the bairn got in at last, and found her teaching true, finding peace with his Creator, through Jesus Christ his Redeemer, and comfort in the Holy Ghost. And now, after safely sheltering all these years in the Cleft Rock of Ages, standing here in the maturity of his manhood, Newark Featonby, of Shotton Colliery,

can sing with a faith which all the critics and sceptics and infidels in the world cannot shake:

> Fixed on this ground will I remain,
> Though my heart fail and flesh decay,
> This anchor shall my soul sustain
> When earth's foundations melt away;
> Mercy's full power I then shall prove,
> Loved with an everlasting love.

'Now, isn't that Bible theology? Aye, as good, sound, soul-saving theology as any professor at Cambridge or Oxford ever taught. "Aye," says somebody, "but ye couldn't pass an exam. wi' that bit, Newark." "Noa, but aw could pass the Cross wi' that bit, and aw could pass through Bunyan's House Beautiful wi' that bit, and aw could pass over the Delectable Mountains wi' that bit—aye, through the river into the Celestial City and hear the "Well done! good and faithful servant," wi' that bit; and if that isn't a first-class pass, then tell me what is. Mothers, please copy; and if ye want your children to get a safe pass from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem, train them in the old Bible, prayer-beaten path which leads to Christ and heaven.'

In preparing his subject the Bible and hymn-book were always at hand, and with two such sources, and his remarkable originality and genius, there was always freshness of thought in his productions, whatever form they took. As he never wrote his sermons, his style of treatment and manner of delivery varied, according to the state of body or mood of mind in which the hour of service found him. But with his

knowledge of the people amongst whom he laboured, with his ready wit and keen sense of humour, he often gave in a humorous form the most pointed and practical applications of truth, with apposite illustrations from life as he saw it, the force of which his hearers did not fail to realize.

One Sunday afternoon he read very slowly, and with well-placed emphasis, the text, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Then, pausing a moment, he looked all over the chapel and, as if he saw the person he wanted to address, he said: 'Now, Nannie, can thou say "Amen" to that? Did thou and Mary ever get that quarrel made up?'

'Noa! Newark, aw've niver spokken tiv her frae that day to this, and what's mair, aw niver will.'

'Then hes thou nut forgeean her, Nannie?'

'No, ah hennat, Newark, and dinnat mean to.'

'Wey! the mair's the pity, Nannie; but mind thou niver ses thee prayers ageyn, because if thou dis there's ne forgiveness for thesel'.'

'Wey, Newark, aw cannot help't. Ef she'd sed anything else aboot me but that aw might hae forgeean her; but for that niver, noa niver.'

'Wey, awm sorry, very sorry for thee, Nannie, that a decent body like thesel' should go to the throne of grace in a spirit like that. Hes thou ever thowt what thy prayer for forgiveness means? "Lord, forgive me my trespasses ageyn Thou, as aw forgive Mary her trespasses ageyn mysel'." Now, the proper

answer to that prayer wad be, "Niver, no niver." Isn't that awful, Nannie, for thou te seal thee awn fate like that?'

Then standing erect, and scanning the congregation as if all were guilty, with lifted hands he exclaimed in a piercing wail: 'Ye Nannies! ye unforgiving Nannies! the Lord have mercy upon ye, and soften your unforgiving hearts.'

Then suddenly changing his tone, as if speaking confidentially, he said: 'Can ye see yersels in that picture? Isn't it like ye? Can ye spare me one of your photos for my album, please, and aa'l write underneath, "A poor, lost, loveless, unforgiving, and unforgiven woman, nursing her own wrath against the day of wrath"? Dare you, with such a spirit, teach your bairns to say their prayers, and ask them to follow your own example? And you forgiving Nannies, you good, common-sense, Christian women, go on; forgiving and forgetting the wrongs you receive, as you need and expect to be forgiven. You can consistently pray, and teach your children to pray; and however long they may live, or wherever their lot may be cast, the example you show them and the prayers you teach them will never be forgotten; and to illustrate this point let me tell ye a story. One cold, wet day an old man came to my door begging; and seeing he was shivering with cold, aw said, "Would you like to be warmed a bit?" He replied, "Yes, sir." "Come in, then," aw said, and set him a chair well up to the fire. Aw was just

getting a draw of the pipe, and, thinking he might like a puff or two, aw said, "Do you smoke, friend?" "Yes, sir, when aw get the chance." So I filled him a pipe, and the old man had a good smoke; it did me good to see how the poor old fellow enjoyed it. But, knowing by experience that clouds of smoke from the very best tobacco is only thin for an empty stomach, aw said, "Would you like a cup of tea, friend?" "Yes, sir, if you please." So aw popped on the kettle and poked up the fire, and our Bessie made him a nice warm cup of tea. Then, having warmed him and dried him and smoked him and fed him, aw thought, "Now a word about his soul." Ye see, he was now in a nice way for taking it in. "Do you ever pray?" says aw. "Yes, sir, aw say my prayers every night." "Well, what do you say when you pray?" "Aw just say what my mother learned me." "But do you remember what your mother learned ye?" "Yes, sir." "How old are ye?" "Seventy-two." "And ye still say the same prayers?" "Yes; aw say, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.'" "And what after that?"

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee."

"Very good! What then?" "Wey, aw say, 'God bless my father and mother, grandfathers and grandmothers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins, and everybody, for Christ's sake. Amen.'"

'Just think: all that big, broad, beautiful prayer,

with the supplements, put into the mind of a little child, and long, long years after father and mother and grandfather and grandmother were dead and gone, poor old Dick was still repeating the prayers of his childhood at threescore years and twelve. Youth and strength gone, health and friends gone, living all alone in his lonely cottage with a few pieces of old rickety furniture, and still repeating the old, old, well-worn prayers his mother taught him.'

The service ended, and some of the 'Nannies' went home encouraged; whilst others went home 'sure and certain' that some busybody had been kind enough to tell the preacher 'about things they had nowt to dee with.'

In the evening of the same day, however, his sermon was cast in a different mould, and presented a strange mixture of graphic descriptions, bristling points, and beautiful conceptions, sometimes finishing with a comical climax of which he had never thought, and as unexpected to himself as it was to his hearers, but the whole given with an impassioned earnestness and an eloquence of both eye and tongue which kept his hearers in rapt attention to the finish.

The chapel was crowded, the singing was hearty, and the preacher, evidently in one of his best moods, all aglow with his subject. Having read out his text, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel,' he began slowly:

'Good old Simeon, grand old man, he was a *just* man; a foursquare man; he could stand face to face with any man, for he owed no man anything, and never did a mean or dirty thing to anybody, neither did he tell tales about his neighbours, or seek to pry into their affairs. Simeon was no gossip, neither a tale-listener nor a tale-bearer; he had something else to do and think about, for he was a *just* man.

'Then he was also a *devout* man. Often at the throne of grace, where he *waited* on the Lord, and waited *patiently*; and his patience was rewarded, for in his waiting it was revealed to him that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ. You know some people go to the throne of grace in such a hurry always they haven't time to *wait*, and they lose much blessing, and remain in the dark about many things they might get to know if they could only wait. But good old Simeon had *learned to wait*, and so he came to have that revelation; and as he kept on waiting, the Holy Spirit led him beyond the revelation, to the fact revealed; to the very consolation itself, for which he was waiting. If the "pressure of business" that morning, or the early pleasure trip, had hindered him waiting, what a loss—an eternal loss—just to secure a customer, or to get a day's pleasure. Simeon in that case would never have been heard of, and this beautiful scene would never have occurred: for there wasn't another man in Jerusalem fit for such an honour, or waiting for such a job.

'But the Holy Spirit found him on the look-out, and led him up to the temple. The silver trumpet had just been blown, and the doors of the temple opened; the priests were already at work, and the people were coming in; and as Simeon stood, *waiting* and watching, his eye fell upon two people—husband and wife—coming in with a Baby. There was nothing about them to draw attention, and the priests just took their offering of two young pigeons, and, like men used to it with other people waiting, they pushed on with their work. They knew their customers when they saw them, and, judging from appearances, they expected nothing from these two people but pigeons, so that from the neb (bill) of the birds to the end of their tails was just the length of the priests' faith. And according to their faith it was done unto them—*in pigeons.*

'But the old man, who had long been waiting for the consolation of Israel, came expecting to receive that consolation, and he received it. He came expecting to see the Lord's Christ, and he saw Him. And when did any one come expecting to see Him and didn't see Him? And though these priests had been anointed with oil in the consecration service, properly ordained, and in the true succession, standing at the altar in all the dignity of their priestly robes, yet *they* saw nothing about Joseph and Mary and the Babe but their poverty and pigeons. Poor priests! Blind as bats in the midst of sunshine! They were more at home in the darkness, outside of which they

couldn't see. If Herod had come into the temple they would have seen *him*. But moral worth and the beauty of holiness were no more to them than a diamond would be to a hen on a dung-hill, scrattin' for what it could get. Though Simeon had never been ordained, yet he had an insight and knowledge of the divine will which never a priest about the place possessed. The Holy Spirit who led him that morning into the temple had anointed him with an eye-salve by which he could see all the promises and prophecies from Adam and Eve to Malachi pointing directly to this Child. And so, passing over the temple floor, he stopped them. "You come from Bethlehem?" he said. "Yes." "And you belong to the family of David too?" "Yes." "I was sure of it," he said; and taking the Child in his arms (and here, suiting the action to the word, laying his handkerchief on his left arm in baby form), and looking earnestly upon Him, he said: "Come at last, hinney! Oh, come at last!" Then, looking up, he said, "Aw can come any time now, Lord; let me depart in peace, according to Thy word: for aw've seen Him, aw see Him now. What a Light! And what Glory! O Eve! Mother Eve! The Bruiser of thy enemy is come, born of a woman; and Abraham, aye, what Abraham would have given to see that tiny little face! He would have rejoiced to see the promised Seed, the very Baby in which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. What would good old Jacob have given to see his own Shiloh come! And how

David would have tuned his harp and danced for joy to look upon the Holy One, which should not see corruption! Isaiah would have gone into ecstasies to see this Rod from the stem of Jesse—this Branch growing out of his roots. Ezekiel would have been glad indeed to see his own Ruler. Daniel—brave, good Daniel—would have been content to stand in his lot to the end of the days, and even longer, to witness his own Messiah. Haggai would have discovered in that little Babe the Desire of all Nations. Malachi would have seen in these beautiful features the Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings. But they didn't see it. Prophets, priests, and kings desired to see, but didn't see it. All this has been reserved for me, for a poor old man like me, to hold on my arm the Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory —— " ' Here a sudden fit of coughing interrupted the flowing stream. This over, he calmly resumed his subject: ' Just when that little earthquake came on I was telling ye about Simeon, and what else aw might have said dear knows. But ye see, one sometimes needs to be humbled, and a cough like that clips the wings of a man's fancy, and brings him down rather suddenly. Now that aw am down, aa'l just try to talk a bit upon the level.

' Simeon, ye see, wasn't in holy orders, as they say; and yet he was holy enough to be in the Lord's Secret. For " the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him "; and " if any man do His will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

There, my local brethren, that's a hint for you; for whatever else ye lack, ye can have as much of the Holy Ghost as either parsons, priests, or bishops, by *waiting*, as Simeon waited, till the Holy Ghost was upon him, and as the fishermen of Galilee waited in the upper room at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high; for ye see there's no difference at the throne of grace—it all lies in the *waiting*. And that's a hint for ye class-leaders and Sabbath-school teachers, and all ye Christian workers; ye all may rejoice in the consolation of Israel, and walk in the Light to lighten the Gentiles, like Simeon. But mind, like Simeon, *be just and devout, and wait.*'

Featonby was as much at home in the class-meeting as he was in the pulpit, and never left his members groping in a theological haze. His class consisted chiefly of miners, whom he made perfectly at home by addressing them in their own vernacular. One of his members, for instance, who never seemed to have any brightness in his life, and who generally gave his experience or expressed his feelings in a doleful strain, was one night accosted by his leader, who said, 'Noo, Jack, hinney, how is thee getting on te-neet?' 'Ay Newrick, aw hardly knaw, but it's very badly. Aw's good for nowt. The Lord hes had a bonny lot o' fash wi' me, and aw's flaid the devil'll get me at last.' 'Aye,' said the old leader in a similar funereal tone, 'Thou and me's both of one mind, Jack. Thou is good for nowt, and aw think thou niver was good for much; and it's true the Lord

hes had a lot of fash wi' thae, and thoo hes good reet to be flayed the devil'll get thae at last.' Poor Jack, taken at his own estimate, looked up at the old leader in dismay, and the members looked at each other with anticipations of a coming flash which would clear the air. Then the eyes of the leader suddenly brightened, as if a new light had broken in, and laying his hand on Jack's shoulder, in an animated tone he said: 'But dizzent thoo see, Jack, that poor a thing as thoo is, the Lord thowt thoo was worth makkin, and He myed thae; and dizzent thoo see He thowt thoo was worth redeemin', and He sent His Son to redeem thae; and diz thoo think efter makkin' thae and redeemin' thae, at such a cost, and hevin' all the fash wi' thae He's had, that He's gaun to let the divil hae thae at last? Get away wi' thae, and let's hev nee mair gloom; the Lord cares mair for thoo than thoo dis for thisel'"; and poor Jack, who came to the class writing bitter things against himself, went home with the feeling that, Jesus having died for even him, things were not so bad after all.

During Featonby's last illness, which was very prolonged, his suffering being severe and ceaseless, I visited him several times, and on my last visit there was obviously the feeling with us both that it was probably our last meeting on earth. When we were left alone in the room he said, 'You will find my long pipe and tobacco on the mantelpiece: fill and light it for me.' All was done to order, and after

a whiff or two of the pipe he said, 'Now, that's very comfortable. Talk or read to me something worth hearing.' Taking up the hymn-book, I read to him that beautiful hymn beginning, 'Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness and sorrow,' and to each point and truth it contains he responded with an earnestness which made the reading of every line more impressive. At the words,

> Thou knowest, not alone as God, all knowing;
> As Man our mortal weakness Thou hast proved,

he said ,'Stop there. Read them words slowly'; and as the words were slowly read, he sat upon the bed with the pipe between his finger and thumb, with the curling thread of smoke ascending therefrom, his dark eyes twinkling as from a living light behind them, then said: 'That's beautiful! Our Bessie, and the good, canny neighbours who come in to help her, they hear my groans and see my restless tossings, and they say, "Poor man! he must be suffering a great deal," and that's all they know.' Then, looking up, he said: 'Thou knowest, not alone as God all knowing; as man, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved; on earth with purest sympathies o'erflowing, O Saviour, Thou hast wept, and Thou hast loved; and love and sorrow still to Thee may come, and find a hiding-place from the storm and the tempest, a rest for the weary when the pains and toils of life are over, and a home when the earthly house of this shattered tabernacle is removed and laid to dissolve in the dust: a home in a house not made with hands,

eternal in the heavens. Yes, George,' he continued, raising his voice to the old pulpit tone, 'Christ is a glorious reality. Preach that everywhere, for it is true.'

In a few days the brave old veteran, after fifty-five years of toil as a local preacher amongst his own people, was laid to rest at the ripe age of seventy-five. At his funeral the clergyman, with whom he had been very intimate, and who had often joined in Christian fellowship with him, after reading the service ascended the pulpit and read the parable of the talents; then, pointing to where the coffin stood, he said, 'To the good man whose remains lie in that coffin God gave five talents. He used them freely on his own level of life, amongst his own people, and he has died with ten talents, and to-day has his reward. In my pastoral visits I have sometimes met him in the sick-room, and it was delightful to hear his counsels and the prayers with which he was always ready, and which bore a beautiful testimony to his character and moral worth.'

CHAPTER XVI

How the Wesley Guild kept Willie Oliver's Golden Wedding

IT was in fact a kind of 'special providence wedding,' the celebration of which came about rather oddly and took a somewhat unusual form. The Guild had arranged for one of the February cottage prayer-meetings to be held in the house of Old Widow Richardson, who didn't often get out to service. At seven on the usual evening all the seats provided were occupied, and though the weather was wintry and the night was dark and cold outside, yet inside, the cheerful glow of a well-coaled fire, with the aid of a lamp and candles, gave the cosy room an air of comfort quite in keeping with the family feeling and oneness of purpose which had drawn the company together. The risks and toils of the mine, too, being over for the day, the miners present gave expression to their feelings of thanksgiving and praise in some of the good old Methodist hymns, sung to stirring tunes of the olden time, followed by short, earnest prayers for further blessing, under which their hearts were filled with an 'inner glow of living light,' and all agreed at the close of the service that 'we really had a very good time.'

Then arose, as often does after the cottage prayer-meeting, a kind of free-and-easy talk, in which some referred to the services of the Sunday before. Others recalled services and preachers they remembered in days gone by, while some hopefully anticipated the work immediately before us. Old Willie incidentally remarked to a young man sitting next him that if Ann and he were spared to see the thirteenth of March it would be their Golden wedding-day, and then enlarged—as only Willie could—on their wedding-day at Warkworth fifty years before.

Now, had he been talking to an older man the matter would probably have ended there, but with young folks 'wedding' is generally catching in a very real sense. At a special meeting promptly called the members of the Guild concluded that, though there was not a wedding on the 'programme for the season,' yet it was one of those special occasions in life for which people could always make time when they wanted to. So it was agreed that the Golden Wedding of Ann and Willie Oliver should be run by the Wesley Guild as an 'extra special,' and that the celebration should, as far as possible, fittingly crown their fifty years of honest toil and domestic enjoyment which married love and godly living bring.

The worthy couple were amongst the oldest inhabitants of the village, and were highly esteemed and respected by all who knew them. Willie, who was seventy-nine years of age, was from his infancy brought up in the village, where he had developed

into a strong, active, manly fellow, who was as much concerned about doing a full day's work well as he was about getting a fair day's wage for it. He put conscience and pride into his work, so that he not only gave satisfaction generally, but with conscientious employers sometimes received higher wages than he bargained for. It was generally acknowledged that Bill Oliver, of Sherburn, besides being an honest workman, could cut and fix a drain, handle the scythe as deftly, and lay down a field of grass or oats as evenly and quickly, as any man in the county of Durham.

Ann, too, had been well trained in the domestic duties of a cottage home, in which she had learned to economize her time and make the most of things within her reach: so that instead of talking of what she could do and would do if she only had the means, Ann gave practical illustrations of true social economy in doing the best she could with what she had, literally fulfilling the proverb of Solomon, 'She looked well to the ways of her household, and ate not the bread of idleness': for besides keeping the home tidy and looking well after the family, she often found time to give Willie a hand in the garden at night, making his toil more than half lighter while she was there.

Though Ann had no time for gossip, and was not much of a visitor, she was generally regarded as a 'canny neighbourly body,' always ready to help those around her in time of need or sickness. With a

womanly heart, in her own quiet, unostentatious way she rendered much of that unnoticed, self-denying service of which the world takes so little note, but which in the final audit of human affairs will be found in the record of ordinary daily life under the head of 'Inasmuch.' The 'Well done' for the one talent faithfully used will then be her great reward.

Such were the bride and bridegroom whose fifty years of married courtship the Guild had decided to crown by a public celebration of their golden wedding, and whose plain, unpretentious, godly living and high-toned moral character young folk and old alike had learned to appreciate and to honour.

There was, of course, no publishing of 'the banns,' but at the Sunday night service the celebration of the golden wedding was duly announced for Saturday, March 13, at seven p.m., and a general invitation was given. During the week, however, poor Willie, who had been looking forward with all the eagerness of a bridegroom, was laid up with a severe attack of illness, and on the Saturday was too unwell to be present. This was indeed a great disappointment to himself and to all concerned, as it generally is when the bridegroom fails to turn up for the wedding.

Yet, unlike ordinary weddings, in which the non-appearance of so important a person would have upset the whole arrangement and rendered the gathering null, the circumstances happily admitted of a substitute for introducing and presenting the

bride to the guests. At seven p.m. on the night named the chapel was well filled. The choir, the organist, and the string band of the Guild were all in their places. On a table in front of the rostrum a number of plants and flowers were neatly arranged, and in the centre a well-iced bride-cake was mounted on a beautiful electro-plated tray.

The young ladies of the Guild, combining common sense with good taste, were suitably arranged as bridesmaids for the wedding, yet ready for ministering to the large assembly of guests without loss of time or change of dress; and were truly as charming in appearance as they were practical in service, being the kind of material of which good, useful housewives are made. Could any of those good people who form such erroneous views of colliery village life have looked in at the well-lighted chapel, and noted the general arrangements, with the cheerful animated appearance of the congregation, and known the circumstances which had brought them together, the sight might have helped to clear the smoke-coloured atmosphere through which their mistaken views are sometimes obtained.

The service commenced with the hymn,

> O God of Bethel, by whose hand
> Thy people still are fed,

which was sung with reverent enthusiasm and followed by prayer. Then, as the bride was led in at the vestry door, the band struck up the 'Wedding March.' The congregation rose to their feet as she

entered, and two young bridesmaids came forward with neatly-arranged bouquets for the bride and the bridegroom, amid the hearty acclamations of the audience and the stirring strains of the music. Good, unassuming old Ann, however, trembled with emotion as she was led to her seat, to find herself the object of so much unexpected stir and hearty attention: for she knew nothing of the arrangements nor what to expect, beyond the fact that the Guild was going to manage the golden wedding.

With the ending of the march the excitement sobered down, and the singing of a thanksgiving hymn prepared the congregation for the more immediate business of the evening. The President of the Guild in a short congratulatory address referred to the wedding of fifty years ago, and the long married courtship and consistent godly living which had so happily culminated in the golden wedding they were now met to celebrate. After expressing the general regret at the absence of Willie, he handed to the bride the wedding presents prepared by the Guild, consisting of a purse of gold, which at least provided for the rent for some time to come, and also a fine illustrated Life of Wesley, in large type. Ann received these gifts with a full heart and a brief but grateful 'Thank you all,' the depth and sincerity of which were felt and recognized by the congregation by a hearty response, with here and there a 'God bless you!' dropped in as 'accidentals' in the closing chorus of applause.

The story of a wedding, however, would be incomplete without some description of the bridal dress, which was of course in keeping with the long-formed habits of the bride and her environment in life, and can in no sense be classed with those described in the report of a fashionable wedding. The up-to-date fashion papers with illustrations formed a kind of literature above her level. The only censor or critic Ann cared for was Willie, and the only thing Willie cared for about the wedding being Ann, the dress was really a secondary matter. If he liked the bonnet, shawl, or dress—and he always liked what she wore—Ann was satisfied; hence there were no laces, ruffles, chiffons, nor embroidery to describe, no jewellery or outward ornament, beyond the old well-worn wedding ring encircling fifty years of married memories which to them formed life's truest wealth. The dress was, of course, the best Sunday gown, with a neat unfeathered bonnet, and a warm old-fashioned Paisley shawl made for wear; and a neatly-frilled cap surrounded the open, honest face, which was itself the central point of observation. The bride was more to the observers than even the bridal dress, her adorning being 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,' which is in the sight of God of great price.

In due course tea and coffee, with cakes, including bride-cake, were served by the bridesmaids to every guest. Much pleasant conversation was enjoyed in this Methodist 'At Home'; then solos and duets were sung. Short, racy addresses were given by the

vice-presidents of the Guild, and with the felt presence of Him who honoured and graced the festive board at Cana, the guests took their leave well prepared for the Sabbath services. The younger folks departed with a private hint 'never to marry unless they could ask Jesus to the wedding.'

The President of the Guild accompanied Ann home, to have a few words with Willie and to give him particulars of the service. The old man, sitting up in bed as they entered, said, 'Noo, ye've getten back. What sort of a neet hae ye had?'

'Eh! Willie,' said Ann, 'we've had such a grand meeting; ye wad ev enjoyed it. The only drawback was, ye weren't there.'

'Aye,' said Willie, 'aw wad like to hae been there. But, ye see, the Lord thowt fit to keep me at hyem.'

Then Ann, stepping up to the bed, laid the wedding present before him; and putting the purse into his hand, she said, 'Them's the weddin' presents they've gi'en us.'

'Wy, what's this ye've gi'en me wi' this band on?'

'That's a purse,' she said, 'but aw canna tell ye what's in't.'

The purse being opened for him, the money fell out on the quilt. Willie, turning round, said,

'What's this aboot, sir? What dis 't mean?'

'Well,' was the reply, 'it's a golden wedding, you know, and that gold is yours.'

Then, looking down at the money, he burst into tears, saying, 'We canna tak' 't, sir; we canna tak' 't.

We've duin nowt to desarve all this kindness. It'll hae to gan for the good o' the cause, sir, it will.'

'Yes, Willie,' was the reply. 'You are the cause just now, and Ann will apply the money to the good of the cause as no one else can; so you must be content to leave it as it is.'

Then after a few words of prayer they were left to talk over their golden wedding, in which they rejoiced as the crowning joy of their lives.

* * * *

Twelve months had passed away since the Golden Wedding, and on the thirteenth day of March the chapel was again filled, and the organist, with the choir and the Guild, were again in their places. A black cloth hung from the reading-desk of the rostrum just over where the bride-cake stood amidst the decorations twelve months before. A silent sadness filled all hearts as the mortal remains of good old Ann were borne slowly down the aisle and placed in front of the family pew. The sadness deepened at the sight of old Willie taking his seat alone where Ann sat twelve months before. A brief but impressive service followed, the congregation rising as the organ solemnly wailed out the strangely mournful cadences of the 'Dead March' in *Saul*, whilst the striking contrast of the two scenes, with only one short year between, intensified the feeling of sympathy with Willie in the sorrow and loneliness henceforth to be his lot.

For some years Willie lived on in the old cottage,

cared for and ministered to by his son and his wife. Yet the sense of loss was ever present with him, and never failed to find expression. Whatever came, Ann was always at the front, inseparable from his thoughts and the associations of life. They had always moved together, and in the heart of Willie they moved together still. A beautiful and touching illustration of this was given in connexion with the Twentieth Century Fund meeting. In the afternoon of that day Willie hobbled down the village to the house of his class-leader, and on entering the room, he said,

'Aw thowt aw wad cum doon an' see ye before the meetin', and get this matter off my mind.'

'Well, what is on your mind now, Willie?'

Removing his stick from his right hand, in which he evidently held something else, he laid on the table two sovereigns and two shillings.

'There,' he said, 'there's a guinea for Ann and a guinea for me for that Cent'ry Fund. She'll hae to be in wi' me.'

'Now, Willie,' said the leader, 'where have you got this? You really cannot afford it.'

'Wey, niver mind, sir, where it's cum frae; it's thar, an' it'll hae ti gan for the good o' the cause.'

'Now, Willie——'

'Wey now, sir, it's nee use argeyin' aboot it. Our nyems has stood side be side in your class-beuk for forty-one years. An' they've been all that time side be side i' the Lamb's beuk ov life up yonder, an' they'll hae to be side be side i' that Cent'ry rowl-beuk

when it's riddy; as a'll put them in mesel, so that's settled.' And in due course he had the satisfaction of placing the names side by side on the 'roll.'

The old man still wandered in the well-kept garden where Ann and he had so often toiled together, feeling a melancholy pleasure in recalling its memories, leaving it with a feeling of sadness, longing for

> The touch of a vanished hand
> And the sound of a voice that is still.

He occupied the same seat in the chapel, but, as he often said, with a sense of vacancy at his side. From the day when she was laid to rest in the old churchyard, over a mile from the village, Willie set off (weather and rheumatism permitting) with a stout stick in either hand, without which he could not walk, and went his way to the grave, with the feeling that he was nearer to her there. Standing by her graveside, he talked to Ann as if she heard him, and he prayed that he might soon join her in the Father's house with its many mansions, where they would be at home together with Jesus for evermore.

CHAPTER XVII

Some Christmas Memories, which Caused my Christmas Dream.

ONE of the cherished memories of my youth and early manhood, and one which the maturer years of life have strengthened, has been—and still is—the annual gathering of the village chapel choir in the early hours of Christmas morn for singing 'Methodist Christmas carols' through the village, and so keeping up the custom which the early Methodists established in the colliery villages of Durham over a hundred years ago. The carols consisted of certain well-known Methodist hymns and tunes with which the singers were familiar.

A brief description of such gatherings may perhaps interest some of my readers who are not familiar with village life, and may also revive pleasant memories of bygone days with others now far, far away from the old village home and the well-remembered scenes and surroundings of their youth.

Time, say, three o'clock on Christmas morn. Place of meeting, the Methodist chapel. Present, the choir, with men and women who once were in it, turning out to join again in the time-honoured custom and keep alive the pleasant recollections of their earlier days, a few of the older members of the

church and elder scholars of the Sunday school, considerably enlarging the choir and helping to swell the joyous strains of Christmas praise. The fiddlers, too —and in the olden time the clarionet-players—drew together, tuning the fiddles and resining the bows, whilst sundry candle-lit lanterns glimmered here and there in the throng, ready for use as required, and which at least helped to make the darkness visible.

It was a treat to see the old leader, prompt to the minute, taking his stand in the midst, and in a few plain, homely words giving a kindly greeting in the village vernacular.

'Noo, hinnies, aw wish ye all a happy Christmas. Thenk God we're here agyen on another Christmas mornin' to silibrate the birth of Jesus, the Saviour on us all, and as another year's marcies and blissin's hes fawn tiv our lot, we'll just hev a word or two ov prayer. Mind ye, hinnies, nivver dee nowt ye cannot ax His blissin' on afore ye start, an' ye'll nivver get very far wrang.'

Then after a short earnest prayer, glowing with all the fervour of Christmas gladness, while the old-fashioned hearty responses rose on all sides, the old man continued:

'Noo, it's a cawd mornin', hinnies, to be oot in, an' aw see Jack Frost's puttin' a bit colour inti yer cheeks an' touchin' up yer whiskers a bit. But ye mun sing wiv all yer hearts and try to keep yersels warm. Ye see, the time we're busy outside, Santy Claes'll be busy inside iv all the houses, an' ther'll

be a bonnie te dee when the bairns weykin' up wi' huz singin' at the door, an' the canny little things finds the stocken-legs all full, hingin' at the boddom o' the bed—ae, hinnies! What a dowley world this wad 'a been ef Jesus hadn't cum! There wad hae been nee Christmas, an' nee Santy Claes, an' what a pity it wad hae been ef the shipperds hadn't been out that neet and heerd that sang ov goodwill to men! Ye see, it taks es all in, the bairns an' all. Bliss His nyem for iver! Now come, lads, snuff the cannels i' them lanterns, and get yer beuks out; it's time we were off. The first hymn, "O for a thousan' tongues to sing My greet Redeemer's praise."'

Then fiddles, clarionets, and voices broke promptly into the stirring strains of lively old 'Bristol,' to which certain variations had been set for the instruments, which the fiddlers didn't forget. Bows were drawn with a will, and fingers grew tremulous under the fiddlers' inspiration as the varying runs of demi-semi-quavers called forth all their skill, while the choir sang with the animating spirit of Christmas-time upon them; and after repeating with fervent vigour the lines, ''Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'Tis life and health and peace,' the old man led the way, saying, 'Praise the Lord for that, hinnies; it's a grand start.'

Then passing through the village, singing at places arranged for, they finished up at the chapel, where a lively prayer-meeting was generally held for half-an-hour, followed by the 'singers' breakfast,'

which all heartily enjoyed. Then after singing the old hymn, ' For the Society at parting,'

> And let our bodies part,
> To different climes repair,
> *Inseparably joined in heart*
> *The friends of Jesus are,*

in a few minutes they were all in their several homes in the same village, and pretty certain to meet again during the day.

My first Christmas experience with the singers—though I was only six years of age—was marked by a somewhat ludicrous incident not easily forgotten.

A farmer, living just outside the village, kept a large, sturdy old he-goat, as surly and cantankerous-looking a brute as ever lived; and certainly his looks in no way belied his character. With a long grey beard fringing his lower jaw, and two large projecting teeth relieving the monotony of the framework above, giving the cavity between the appearance of a sort of rat-trap, a pair of large horns towering above his head, with his fierce, repulsive-looking eyes, were strikingly suggestive of something ' uncanny ' lurking immediately behind. Being as vicious and mischievous as he looked, though only known to us children as ' Horney Billy,' he was regarded by some older people as ' Awd Horney's awn sel '; for he was not only the terror of us children, butting and pinning us against the wall or rails when he had the chance, but ' with his impidence ' he entered the houses where the doors were left open, and often leaped the garden fence where there was anything to get or

mischief to be done. Having no appreciation of order, beauty, or fragrance, 'Horney' often trampled down or rooted up the flowers, nibbled bare the plants and neat little boxwood borders by the side of the paths, and with a kind of demoniac pleasure peculiar to his kind, frequently turned some little home-made village Eden into a scene of disorder and ruin.

Amongst other feats, he was sometimes seen and heard perambulating along the tops of the low-tiled houses with that ease and safety which showed he was 'to the manner born.'

Thus on the morning in question he was seen moving leisurely along the ridge of the houses, keeping pace with the singers on the street till the end of the village was reached, and whilst the last hymn was being sung a few yards from the chapel door, 'Horney' managed to descend unobserved, and in the darkness he quietly entered the chapel, where, true to his climbing instincts, he at once passed up the staircase to the little gallery. In the meantime the chapelkeeper was lighting the candles in the little four-branched, green-painted, tin and wire chandelier which hung by a cord from the ceiling.

By the time the choir and friends were seated in the body of the chapel, 'Horney' had placed himself in position with his hind feet on the form and his fore-feet on the gallery front, where, proudly poised on his 'coign of vantage,' he silently watched the proceedings below. Just as the hymn for the prayer-meeting was being announced, some of the young

folk, looking up at the candles 'dimly burning,' saw the large eyes shining as reflectors of the faintly spread light, with the awful-looking horns towering above. A shriek of terror suddenly rang through the chapel, startling all present with fear and apprehension of they knew not what; till, in the tumult, one girl pointed to the gallery, and all eyes were turned in that direction, where, looming in the darkness beyond, 'Awd Horney' was indistinctly seen, moving his large eyes in a weird kind of glitter. As his personality was discovered, however, fear and reverence gave place to half-smothered laughter among the young folks as they saw 'Billy,' with his natural gravity, looking down unmoved by all the din, whilst some of the senior brethren quietly smiled; others, deeply shocked at such irreverence, strongly expressed their feelings at 'the impident animal' coming in there, and also at the folly of folks 'gigglin' an' laffin'' at such an animal as that in a place of worship.

This for a moment somewhat restrained the feeling, but when two stalwart brethren in their indignation went up to cast the evil spirit out, the laughter broke out more vogorously than ever, as 'Awd Horney' firmly resisted, and for some time successfully butted his assailants, till in the scramble he was fairly caught by the horns. The excitement and laughter increased as they came into sight on the open staircase, one pulling him down by the horns and the other pushing behind with all his weight and might, whilst 'Horney,' getting a fresh foothold at

every step, wriggled and firmly contested every inch of the way, till, reaching the floor, the irreverent intruder was ignominiously ejected from the premises. The invasion of the Methodist chapel, however, for once set the Christmas prayer-meeting aside.

Village life in those days had but little to relieve the monotony of the miners' cheerless toil. Christmas Day and Good Friday were the only holidays they had; the former, with its festivities, was a veritable oasis in the desert of a miner's life. Hence the Christmas morning gatherings were popular with all classes of the community, and even the non-chapel-goers appreciated and expected their share of the Christmas carols, and often selected some favourite hymn and tune carrying some personal or family association or memory of the past, and which were not unfrequently sung at the same door for years in succession.

The last Christmas, however, which I spent with my native village choir was to me the most interesting and impressive of all the memories in the chain. We had made our usual tour, and sung at all the places fixed upon, including the cottage in which I was born twenty-six years before. Then followed the choir breakfast, with a couple of hours of social enjoyment in the cheerful glow of Christmas-time, the only drawback to which, as they told me after, was my disappearance, which to them was unaccountable; but having arranged to take part in a service elsewhere at half-past eight that morning, I had left

them somewhat abruptly, without any intimation, but returned in time for a satisfactory explanation with *my bride*. No apology was needed. They saw that, having been to marry a wife, I therefore could not come.

Now, as the event happened before honeymoon excursions and cabs for weddings were known in colliery villages, we quietly left that evening the old home at New Lambton for the new home at Old Sherburn, where during fifty-four years I have passed from the Christmas memories of youth to those of old age.

Now, it was under the spell of these memories of the past, with the incidents of the present and hopes for the future, that my dream arose on a Christmas Eve.

The business of the day was over, and a number of pretty cards, bearing best wishes and kindly greetings, lay ready for post; some to very old friends, keeping us in touch with the days of 'Auld Lang Syne,' and some to very young friends, keeping alive that feeling of youthful freshness which, under the healthy glow of Christmas-time, so forcibly reflects 'the light of other days.'

Having a few calls to make in the village, I went out just as the last red streak of a beautiful sunset faded away in the west. The villagers—chiefly miners—were all safe home from the pit, and with the Christmas holiday before them. The pit clothes were folded and put away out of sight, and in most of the cottages the cosy fireside, fenced with the

brightly polished fender, had already put on that air of Saturday-night tidiness and Sunday-like preparation which characterizes the homes of the miners generally in Durham and Northumberland.

My first call was greeted by a clamour of youthful voices inviting inspection of the Christmas-tree, which, as one of the little fellows said, 'hadn't grow'd, 'cas father and huz hes just meyd it oursels.' The said tree, being neatly shaped, had just been suspended from the ceiling, the connexion therewith being covered with a text-scroll in coloured letters, and as it was turned round you read, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men.' Sundry toys, neat little packets of sweets, some 'shiny bonbons with crackers an funny caps an' things' here and there, and a few bunches of raisins, were visible amongst the holly and ivy leaves, with some bright yellow oranges peeping through the clustering evergreens, forming that happy combination of things temporal and spiritual so characteristic of our good old English Christmas-time.

The mother, too, had just attached to a tack in the wall a neat little straw-framed picture of the Virgin and the Child, with Joseph standing behind, and the shepherds kneeling by the side of the manger. On the margin underneath were the words, 'For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' The mother having properly adjusted the picture, one of the little fellows, all alive with present joy and the hope of good things

to come, suddenly mounted a chair, and with the air of an orator inspired with his theme, placing one finger on the Babe in the manger and pointing the other hand to the Christmas-tree, he said:

'Muther says *it's all Him*, else we waddent hae nee Christmas-tree, and nee Santa Claes, nor nowt.'

The delighted father, stroking the little fellow's head, said:

'Reet, hinney, reet thoo is. Bliss His nyem, ef it wasn't for Him w'ad neither hae nowt nor be nowt. He's all in all tiv us, ivery one.'

The mother, evidently gratified with her success in getting that thought into the mind of her little boy, went on with her last touches of tidying up for the night with a satisfaction all her own.

At my next call I found the Christmas-tree, similar to the one described, in which, however, a sprig of mistletoe was neatly concealed, and under which I was *caught*, with, of course, the penalty to pay. A glowing fire filled the grate, and the table-lamp burning brightly gave the room a cheerful, lively appearance. The father, after a long day's work at the pit, had drawn his chair up to the fire, and sat with his feet resting on the fender, with a clean 'cutty pipe' in his mouth, presenting a picture of homely gladness, as, looking up through the curling clouds of smoke rising from his pipe, he read the ornamental motto on the mantelpiece, 'A happy Christmas to all.' Looking round as I entered, he said:

'A happy Christmas to ye, sir. It's here agyen, an' aw suppose ye'll be out wi' them singin' i' the mornin' as usual?'

'Yes,' was the reply.

'Then think on me, ef ye please, an' let me hae the awd tune 'Sagina':

Leader of faithful souls, and Guide
Of all that travel to the sky.

That's been my Christmas hymn for mony a yeer now, an' aw'll keep't till aw find the New Jerusalem. Aw've been dubble shift to-day, an' aw's ower tired to be out wi' ye. But it'll be grand to lie i' bed an' hear ye sing them words to thet tune. It's a bit frosty, but it's a bonny neet outside, an' aw hope ye'll hev a good time.'

My last call for the night, however, presented a very different scene. The room was somewhat dark, there being no lamp or candle lit, and the fire burning low in the grate shed a dim, flickering light on two little boys seated on a neat home-made hearthrug, trying to cover with some trails of ivy and sprigs of holly a small wooden trundle hoop, and forming as best they could a little Christmas-tree of their own. They, however, had no packets of sweets, or 'shiny bon-bons,' or oranges for ornamenting and enriching their tree. The father, who had made their last Christmas-tree as pretty and fruitful as any in the village, was gone, having lost his life at the pit a few months before. The little luxuries of child-life with them were things of the past, and the comforts and

necessaries of life were now limited, and would have been more limited still but for the widows' and orphans' allowance from the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, the provident society which the father had thoughtfully entered some years before. Their mother, wearied with the toils of the day and with the memories of the season deepening her sense of loss, sat back in the shade at the end of the little kitchen table, leaning thereon, her face resting on her hands, in silent sadness, whilst the subdued undertone in which the children spoke to each other as to ' how father did it last time ' vividly brought before her the joy and brightness of the last Christmas Eve, and as I entered, her struggling feelings found relief in a flood of tears as she slowly sobbed out the words :

' Oh ! it's my first Christmas without him, and if it wasn't for my canny bairns and the hope of bringing them up to meet him in a better world, there's nothing for me to live for. Poor things ! he made them a little Christmas-tree last year so cheerfully, and we were so happy, and now he's gone ; and the thought of him sitting there a year to-night—aw cannot help them with their tree. Oh, it's crushing ! May the Lord Jesus help me to bear it ! '

After a few minutes of forced silence, under feelings not easily suppressed, with a few kindly words of sympathy, and assurance of the promise that Jesus would help her ' to bear it ' and be with her to the end, we knelt in prayer to Him who never heareth in vain. Then after a bit of talk with the

bairns, and a hand in shaping and finishing their tree, we hung it from the clothes-line, to their great satisfaction and joy. One of them, looking up as I bade them good-night, said, 'Ef ye see Sandy Claes ony way about, will ye tell him where we live and ax him to call?'

Assuring him I would try to see 'Sandy Claes' and ask him to call, I turned my steps homeward, pondering over what I had seen and heard and thinking of the great 'Santa Claus' of Bethlehem, from whom all blessings flow and in whom all hopes centre, as the Gift of the Father's love to men; of the peace and joy and hope it inspires in those who accept the Gift, and of its marvellous influence even upon those who have not personally accepted it, but who heartily accept and believe in the story of the Gift and generously help to keep it alive on Santa Claus lines to young and old, or to poor and needy, at Christmas-time.

On reaching home I found my library had during my absence put on a quite Christmas-like appearance. Some well-arranged sprigs of evergreen and white everlastings relieved the picture-frames on the walls and brightened the vases on the mantelpiece. The well-trimmed lamp burned brightly on the table, while the 'Yule Clog' crackled and sparkled on the fire, filling the room with a healthy Christmas glow. My affectionate old dog lay at ease on the hearthrug sniffing his welcome; and as a representative of Santa Claus on his round of good-will to the little folks in

the village looked in for a moment, he reminding me 'that the singers would meet at three a.m.,' I sat down in 'cosy corner' with my feet on the fender, feeling we were in for a good Christmas-time.

Then taking my old Bible from the shelf, I turned to the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel and read once more the 'old, old story,' the world's Evergreen of human history and one of the principal charms of childhood for over eighteen hundred years.

As I lay back in the chair and closed my eyes for a mental reproduction of the scene, the panorama passed again before me, but more vivid and beautiful than ever. Among the straggling line of travellers passing to and fro with their many-coloured costumes, leading or driving their well-caparisoned asses and camels, were Joseph and Mary on their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, halting for a moment at Rachel's tomb, as if in sympathy with its touching tale of hope and sorrow; then leaving the main road to Hebron they followed the well-beaten track over the plain on the left, passing slowly up the short sloping ridge on which Bethlehem stands, where, passing through the old arched gateway into the city, the panorama disappeared from sight. In a few minutes, musing thereon, I fell into a dream in which there lay before me 'The Up-to-Date Rational Bible, free from Priestcraft and Cunningly Devised Fables of the Supernatural and Miraculous, Designed for the Reconstruction of Human Society, on a Purely *Rational* Basis.'

The old Bible, of course, was gone and had become quite a thing of the past, and no one seemed to know anything about it. People were living now on what they called purely rational lines, with no knowledge of any Being higher or better than themselves; and the second chapter of Luke not being in the 'Up-to-date Bible,' no one seemed to know anything of the Bethlehem story of the olden time or to have any remembrance of Christmas. My heart grew sad with the thought that there was *no Christmas now*, with the dark, dull days and long, dreary nights of winter before us, without one bright spot to relieve the months of monotony and gloom. When the third week of December came there was nothing out of the common—no schools breaking up, no young people travelling home, no signs of the cheerful festivities, parties, or family gatherings of the former days. The twenty-fourth of December came, but Christmas Eve and Christmas were out of date now. There were no Christmas cards to post, no Christmas-trees to brighten the cottage homes, nothing whatever to cheer the little folks like the inspiration which the 'old, old story' used to bring; and worst of all, there was no Santa Claus, and on the twenty-fifth of December the stocking legs were empty till the bairns put them on. No Christmas greetings, but just the usual, 'Get ready for school.' The pits and mills were at work, and instead of the old holiday and the turn-out to sing the Christmas carols, the 'caller' had called up the men at the collieries, and the buzzers had roused

the workers for their usual toil at the factories and the mills. Christmas dinners, treats for the poor, and helpful presents to the needy were all things of the past, for the 'Up-to-date' Bible had in it no Babe of Bethlehem, nor any Santa Claus to smite the granite rocks of human selfishness and cause the streams of charity and benevolence to flow through the desert homes of this wilderness world.

Then I saw in my dream that, having no Christmas, the world had no Good Friday, no Easter, and no Whitsuntide. The only general and reliable holidays were all gone with the old Bible, and the 'Up-to-date' edition, on the 'Rational Basis' lines, had left the world's winters without a Christmas and the world without a Christ. The old Christian Sabbaths and places of worship, too, were gone, the Sundays being now arranged for pleasure-seeking in public parks and gardens and so-called 'sacred concerts,' museums, and music-halls, all on 'purely rational lines.' The old churches, chapels, and Sunday school rooms remained open for inspection as relics of an irrational, priest-ridden age.

Then my dream grew darker: for there being no gospel to preach to the poor, no good tidings for healing the broken-hearted, no peace of conscience for the present, and no hope for the future, men were living and dying without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world; and with no prospect of ever meeting friends again after death, there seemed nothing but the dark for evermore; when suddenly

a knock came to the front door and woke me up with the cry, 'Who's there?'

'It's only me, sir!' was the reply. 'I've come to tell ye it wants a quarter to three, and the singers are gathering at the chapel door.' Then as I looked round me the 'Yule Clog' was a glowing mass in the grate, the lamp was still burning brightly, the evergreens were on the walls, and my old Bible lay open at the second chapter of Luke, revealing Christ and Christmas with us still, and I found that the 'Up-to-Date' Bible and the 'reconstruction of human society on purely rational lines' was *only a dream.* So, blessing God for the gift of His love, I went out to join in the village Christmas carols for the sixty-fifth time.

CHAPTER XVIII

Birthday Memories

IN the early hours of my seventy-fourth birthday, whilst somewhat gravely reminded that I had reached another milestone on the journey of life, I heard a youthful voice joyously wishing grand-daddy 'Many happy returns.' With that healthy breeze of fresh morning life the atmosphere became completely changed from the quiet gravity of age into the brightness and buoyancy of youth, with its unquestioning hopes of life's future joys. In the midst of this came also my morning letters, one of which, bringing birthday greetings from afar, awakened old home echoes, whilst the eleven signatures attached thereto were to me as a family chorus to the solo heard a few minutes before, wishing grand-daddy 'Many happy returns.'

As I sat down to breakfast with that letter before me, and that chorus ringing in my ears, I thought that whatever charm might belong to the solitude of single blessedness, it is certain that no bachelor ever enjoyed a birthday breakfast as I did mine.

Under the influence of such feelings, and with mingling memories crowding in upon my mind, the next train found me a passenger to my native village —New Lambton, near Fence Houses station, in the

county of Durham. In a short time I stood once more amid the scenes of my boyhood and youth. As my eye wandered hither and thither over the well-remembered landmarks of my early life, it naturally rested on the picturesque view of Houghton-le-Spring, which, with its streets and cross-streets, covered the long slopes of the old Quarry Hill. More especially, however, it dwelt on the colliery in the foreground where I narrowly escaped from the effects of that terrific explosion in which twenty-six of my fellow toilers were suddenly swept from the natural darkness of the mine into the still deeper darkness and silence of death. Now, after more than half-a-century had passed away, with my eye resting on the pit and the old churchyard where my then fellow workers were laid to rest, the recollections of that awful shock, of my own terrible struggle for life amid the deadly choke-damp, of my effort to climb the shaft, and the hopelessness that seized me as, gasping for breath, I leaned on the guides of the cage, with the feeling that it was all over with me, were vividly renewed. Then memory recalled the few moments of dreadful silence which followed, and the indescribable sensation of the first touch of cool fresh air slowly breaking into the choke-damp, creeping over my face, bringing back strength and hope. Such memories combined to make Houghton-le-Spring colliery the most impressive landmark in my history, and the eleventh of November, 1850, the most eventful day of my life.

The landscape before me, with the hills of Warden

Law on the south-east and Penshaw Hill with its special prominence on the north-east, the farmhouses with the fields and colliery villages spread over the plain, and the long stretch of hills rising on the north and west from the valley of the Wear—each had its own particular story to tell.

Directly in front stood my native village, the special object of my visit, in and round which some of the old environments of life as it was in the days of my boyhood still linger, recalling scenes and incidents, forms and faces, with a vividness and sense of reality which no cinematograph ever could rival.

At one end of that long row of red-tiled houses before me I could see the miner's cottage in which I was born, and at what used to be the other end of the row the old Methodist chapel in which I was 'born again,' whilst between these two birthplaces of mine were the homes of my forefathers, in one of which my father was born close on a hundred years ago. On the other hand, some seven or eight minutes' walk from the chapel there still stands the dear old home with its forty-seven years of family memories, in which my brother and myself developed into manhood and where father and mother ripened into old age and into saving faith in Jesus Christ, passing thence in hope of eternal life. They were known to those around them simply as Willie and Mary Parkinson, with hearts to feel for and hands ever ready to help their suffering neighbours in any time of need.

After this brief survey of the scene I rambled through the fields on the west, which still live in my memory as the 'green pastures beside the still waters' of my youthful days.

There were no mines working then in that locality, so that the clear pellucid stream rising in the hills on the east, and meandering through the vale, retained its purity and formed a rather long stretch of comparatively deep, still waters above the mill-dam. It silently flowed through the meadows lying on either side, and in spring-time looked like a long silvery streak of azure fringed with the richest living green, falling over the dam in a thin sheet, unbroken from bank to bank, glittering in the sunshine and breaking on the uneven slopes below into scores of tiny ripples and gurgling hollows where the bubbling brook often murmured its sweet and soothing music to me in my teens. I sat down once more on the sheltered slopes, between the footpath in the fields and the stream in the valley, in the 'solitary place' of my youth, with pleasant memories of old companions who frequently joined in that spot for reading, conversation, and prayer. They have all long since gone across that other stream at the call of the Good Shepherd, and into greener pastures where living waters flow on for ever.

As I moved away from this quiet retreat I caught sight of a large brier-bush from which I had my earliest and well-remembered lesson in 'Nature study,' when my father showed me the first bird's nest I

ever saw. In it the young birds were chirping and stretching their necks as if hungering and crying (as I thought) for 'mammy.' My father pointed out the mother-bird fluttering excitedly among the bushes close by, lest her little ones should be disturbed in their quiet, cosy home. Though birds and nest were gone, and my father had long passed away, the lesson of kindness to the helpless impressed thus on the mind of a mere child was still deeply engraven in the memory of the old man of seventy-four.

From the fields I made my way to the cottage at the head of the village in which I first saw the light. The door was open into the single room, with a loft overhead, of which the house consisted. The good woman of the house, seeing me pause on the doorstep, turned from the neighbour with whom she was chatting inside. Anticipating her surprise at my action, I said, 'Good-morning, ma'am. Will you kindly allow me to look into your house for a few minutes? My mother, who, like yourself, was a miner's wife, came to live in this house when she was married, over seventy-five years ago. I happened to be born in this room seventy-four years ago to-day. I remember this room and the old pantry behind that door, with the ladder up to the loft, ever since I was three years of age.' 'Oh yes, sir,' exclaimed the good woman; 'step in,' and she, with her neighbour, was evidently interested in my visit. 'Would you like to look into the pantry, sir?' she asked. 'If you please, I should like it very much,' I answered. As she opened the

door leading into my mother's pantry I was, for the moment, carried back again into the atmosphere of my childhood. There on the shelf stood the bread-loaf, with the knife ready for use, just where my mother's used to lie seventy years before; and there remained the very trellis window to which I used to climb, peeping through, and sometimes having to remain until some one came to lift me down.

On re-entering the room, standing between the window and the fireplace, I said, 'This is the spot where my mother used to take her seat at night after getting me ready for bed. Here I laid my stockings on the brick floor where I knelt, and with clasped hands and my head resting on her lap, repeated the prayers she taught me, and answered the very important questions which formed part of that evening service. I want now, in my old age, to kneel again on the spot where I knelt in childhood, and to thank God for my good parents, for the home influences thrown around my early life, and for the plain, simple Christian men and women who helped to direct my thoughts and form my character in the Sunday school, and for the little Methodist chapel at the other end of the street. Now, would you mind kneeling with me two or three minutes?' They knelt reverently as I lifted up my heart and voice to God, with thoughts and feelings which live with me still, praising Him for parents and home, for the still 'Gentle Jesus' of my childhood, and for the Methodist atmosphere in which my lot was cast and my life spent.

My next call in the old village was at the house where my grandmother dwelt. The mistress of the house, knowing me well, kindly invited me in. I explained my reason for calling. I said, 'When I was a very little boy my grandmother lived here, and some of the happiest hours of my childhood were spent playing by this fireside.' After a few words about her parents, whom I knew well, and the old Sunday school in which we both had been trained, I said, 'There are two well-remembered spots here I should like to see. One is just behind the door in the other room.' The door was at once opened, and, pointing to the spot, I said, 'That is where my grandmother knelt to pray so often, with her long bony fingers on my head, pleading for the bairn who now in old age stands by the spot, surely as real an answer to the prayers of old Betty Fenwick in the miner's cottage at New Lambton as the fulfilment of the prayer of Jacob for Ephraim and Manasseh in the land of Canaan.' The other place I wanted to see was my grandmother's pantry. What boy, who ever had a good grandmother, would not want to see into her pantry? She was such a grandmother! She believed in the providence as well as in the grace of God, and she assisted providence by making me nice little currant cakes, very enjoyable at tea-time, or for that special snack which boys and girls sometimes desire between meals. Then, granny-like, she used to put the cakes on the *low* shelf in the pantry, where the bairn could reach them.

My last call was to see my brother. He was my only brother, born in the same house a little under two years after myself, nursed by the same hearth-stone, playing round the same fireside; and as we had kept in touch with each other all through life, this visit formed a fitting conclusion to my birthday rambles over paths and places with which we were both familiar. Quietly enjoying a cup of tea at the old-fashioned fireside, within a stone's throw of the old home where we began life's journey seventy years before, we naturally talked of the past, the associates and companions of youth, and the friends of maturer years with whom we walked 'to the house of God in company, and took sweet counsel together.' We recalled the Saturday-night practice of the village choir, and the hymns and anthems we sang, whilst vanished forms and faces flitted before the eye of memory, and voices long hushed in death vibrated again in memory's ear. We recollected how that choir practice on the Saturday night formed one of the brightest spots of the pit-lad's week, in the 'good old times' when we were called up out of bed at three o'clock in the morning and reached home again at six or seven in the evening. Then we had dinner, a wash, and went to bed, to be called again at three a.m. We thanked God that those dark days were done, and that the lads of to-day have more leisure and better opportunities of improvement than we ever had.

CHAPTER XIX

Jubilee and Harvest

IN the year 1899 I attained my jubilee as a local preacher. The friends in my own society at Sherburn determined to celebrate the occasion, and the various churches in the circuit also took up the matter with warmth; so that in November of that year the Sherburn friends presented me with several articles very useful for travellers, and the wider circle of those interested provided the means of travelling, with the express desire that the long-cherished wish of my life should be carried into effect and that I should visit the Holy Land. My old friend Sir W. H. Stephenson, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, presided at the meeting in the Wesleyan church at Durham. Many kind and appreciative things were said, and there were not wanting evidences that the fifty years' preaching had not been fruitless.

Soon afterwards I left home for Palestine, travelling in company with the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes and Mrs. Hughes, Dr. W. T. Davison, Rev. Thomas Cook, and others. The tour included Sicily, Greece, Palestine, and Egypt, and the scenes familiar to my imagination for over sixty years, through descriptions, maps, and pictures, unfolded themselves in actuality before my eyes. Greece was fascinating to my mind,

but the Holy Land was the real object of greatest interest. As I came to one scene after another full of biblical associations, and especially those connected with the Saviour's earthly life, I felt as if nothing were left for me to desire.

And now, as I look back over the long period of work in the service of the Master, I can with a humble and thankful heart rejoice over the many opportunities of usefulness granted to me in the providence of God. Seventy years ago I became a member of the Methodist Church. Sixty-eight years of Sunday-school teaching, sixty-six years of Bible-class work, sixty-two years as a local preacher, and sixty as a class-leader illustrate that characteristic of Methodism which accounts for its firm hold in country districts and the deep affection with which it is cherished by its adherents. It calls for the services and develops the faculties of all who love the Lord Jesus, and in this way it has raised multitudes of men and women to a level of mental and spiritual efficiency which they could not have realized in any other church.

The labour has been full of joy, and has very really been its own reward. But through all the period the joy of harvest has not been lacking, and in recent years frequent letters have revived the memory of past toil, while testifying to the abiding result. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States contain many who now and then are moved to send assurances of their steadfast continuance in the faith and their entrance into the labours of

those who went before them. At home I have often seen the third, and even the fourth generation of a family appearing on the platform at Sunday-school anniversaries, and repeating the very lessons taught many, many years ago to their parents and grandparents.

All this is cause for deep gratitude to God, and encourages the hope that the bright succession may long run on, and that the labours of those who taught me, prayed for me, and helped me may continue to bear fruit to the glory of God through successive generations, when all their names shall be lost in dim forgetfulness. They served God in their day and generation, they rest in the Lord, and their works do follow them.

> They marked the footsteps that He trod,
> His zeal inspired their breast;
> And following their incarnate God,
> Possess the promised rest.

I close with the earnest prayer that the Methodist Church may never cease to call forth such characters into the field of labour, and to produce those who count it joy to toil and teach and preach the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.