

MEMOIR AND REMAINS

OF THE

REV. ROBERT MURRAY McCHEYNE
11

MINISTER OF ST. PETER'S CHURCH, DUNDEE.

BY THE

REV. ANDREW A. BONAR,
MINISTER OF THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, COLLACE.


WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

BY THE

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Portrait of R. M. Muncey.

Engraved by T. G. Green.

Ever your true friend,
Robt. Muncey, W. W. W. W.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

FROM a desire to render the volume portable, and thus obtain for it a wider circulation, the sermons and some of the minor writings of Mr. McCheyne have been omitted in this reprint. Several of these, however, have been published by the Board of Publication in a separate form, making four or five very small volumes, which are suitable for Sabbath-school Libraries, as well as for the general reader. /

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INTRODUCTORY LETTER.

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
BOARD OF PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES.

REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,—I have received, within a few days, from a valued correspondent in Scotland, a biographical work which I have read with peculiar pleasure, and which I could earnestly wish might be circulated throughout the bounds of our beloved Church. The work to which I refer is entitled, “Memoir and Remains of the Reverend ROBERT MURRAY McCHEYNE, Minister of St. Peter’s Church, Dundee, by the Rev. *Andrew A. Bonar*, Minister of the Free Church of Scotland, Collace.”

Although Mr. *McCheyne* was a young man, not extensively known to fame, who died last year at the early age of twenty-nine, yet he was so highly esteemed and confided in by his brethren of the Church of Scotland, that in 1838, when in the twenty-fourth year of his age, he was chosen, in connexion with three older ministers, on a delegation to the Jews of Europe and Asia; to inquire into their condition, and to report on the prospects and best means of calling their attention to the character and claims of the religion of Christ. This commission he fulfilled with an ability and faithfulness which, together with the preceding and subsequent character of his ministry, caused

his death, which took place in 1843, to be regarded as a great calamity to the cause of truth and of vital piety in North Britain.

The impression left by Mr. McCheyne on the minds of those who were most intimately acquainted with his person and ministry, is strongly portrayed in the following representation, found in a review of this memoir, contained in a periodical published in Edinburgh, and evidently written by one who had the best opportunity of knowing the whole character of the deceased, in all its aspects. The extract will speak for itself. Such language could not have been prompted by an ordinary man.

“ROBERT MURRAY McCHEYNE! To dwell on his saintly character would be a pleasant theme. At this realizing moment to produce his effigy seems a possible task. That countenance so benevolently earnest, with its gleams of brightness flitting over its settled pensiveness;—that eye so mild and penetrating, as of one who had seen through the world’s vanity before he had discerned the Saviour’s beauty;—that forehead familiar with high and holy thoughts;—that disentangled pilgrim-look which showed plainly that he ‘sought a city;’—the serene self-possession of one who walked by faith;—and the sequestered musing gait such as we might suppose the meditative Isaac had;—that aspect of compassion, in such unison with the remonstrating and entreating tones of his melodious and tender voice;—that entire appearance as of one who had been with Jesus, and who would never be right at home till, where Jesus is, there he should also be:—these things we think we could delineate; for associated as they are with some of the most solemn and delightful hours of personal history, they

come back on memory with a vividness which annihilates the interval since last we saw them, and with that air of immortality about them, which says, joyfully, 'He is not dead, but sleepeth.' To know him was the best interpretation of many texts. At least, we have a clearer conception of what is meant by a 'hidden life,' and a 'living sacrifice,' and can better understand the sort of life which *Enoch* led, since we made the acquaintance of *Robert McCheyne*.

"Happy would it have been for Scotland had all its churches and manses witnessed the scenes with which St. Peter's, Dundee, and the abode of its minister had become familiar. So heart-deep and humbling were the confessions of sin in Mr. *McCheyne's* family prayers and in public worship; so far did he descend into the inward abysses of atheism, and carnality, and hypocrisy; and so faithfully and mournfully did he lay before the Lord these hidden plagues, the perversities of motive, and the intricacies of self-righteousness, that nothing was so fitted to convince of sin and destroy confidence in the flesh. Then in his prayers he held such reverential and endearing communion with a reconciled God;—he pressed so near the throne; there was something so filial in his 'Abba, Father;' it was so obvious even to lookers-on, that he was putting his petitions and praises into the golden censer;—so express, and urgent, and hopeful were his supplications, that it was awakening to hear him pray. It was enough to make some Christians feel, 'Hitherto we have asked nothing in Jesus' name;' and enough to prick the heart of prayerless worldlings. His preaching was a continuation of his prayers. In both he spoke from within the veil, his hand on the mercy seat, and his eye fixed on the things

invisible. His usual address was calm and evenly, but arresting and enchanting. His hold of the truth gave him a hold of his hearers. He was at home in the pulpit. He did not need to bestow that care on composition which is incumbent on less gifted men. His poetic fancy and instinctive taste, with a steady flow of thoughts and words, saved him much trouble in this respect. But that was all. He did not avail himself of his fine genius and happy power of language, to procure a name for eloquence. He was content that the subordinate end was answered, and that even in extempore addresses he could proceed without embarrassment or hesitation. His eye was single; his aim was souls—souls for Jesus' sake. He had some other use for his bow than to entertain his hearers with the twang of the sonorous string. The salvation of souls was his object; and in his study preparing for the pulpit, and in the pulpit looking down upon his people, all his anxiety was to find truth that would penetrate the conscience—the unawakened consciences of all kinds of people, and truth which would lead anxious souls to the desired landing-place of peace with God. This unity of purpose gave a continuous earnestness and solemnity to his ministry. His feeblest appeal was more personal and importunate than the most pointed exhortations of vaguer ministers in their most faithful moods. His solicitude for the salvation of his hearers made him affectionate even beyond his natural tenderness. Sometimes a smile of momentary bitterness would be provoked when depicting the absurdity of sin and the infatuation of sinners; but it instantly subsided into the habitual compassion with which he yearned over souls. So well understood was his errand;—so accustomed

were they to the entreating voice and expostulating attitude of this ambassador of Christ;—so thoroughly aware that he was seeking their immediate conversion were the most careless in his congregation, that any disquisition which had not a present and practical bearing, a sermon without Christ or without earnestness, would have astonished the most indifferent among them, and made them fear that their minister was no longer himself.

“ Commending the truth to every man’s conscience in the sight of God, a demonstration of the Spirit seldom failed to accompany his preaching. His ministry at Dundee was a constant awakening, and he seldom addressed an auditory elsewhere without its proving to some a time much to be remembered. Nay, a demonstration of the Spirit accompanied his presence. His visits to pious families were hallowing, and his casual contact with secular men was solemnizing; and even those who only ‘wondered and perished’ knew that a prophet had been among them indeed.

“ But his character has been so often delineated already, and the materials for knowing him better which these volumes supply, are so abundant, that we shall not pursue this personal portraiture any further. Nor shall we fill our pages with extracts from a book which we hope every reader of this Review has, by this time, either read or begun to read. His school-companion, his fellow-pilgrim to Palestine, his near neighbour in the ministry, and most frequent coadjutor in each labour of love, is his biographer. No one who knew how undivided in *his* life Mr. *McCheyne* and Mr. *A. Bonar* were, thought that any other should attempt

the record of that life; no one who reads it could wish that any other had. By natural talent fitted to notice the finer features of character, and to fathom some of its abstruser depths, and by a better taste accustomed to observe the rise and progress of religion in the souls of men, and peculiarly happy in describing things as he sees them, Mr. Bonar is a fit biographer in any case where eminent piety reigned in a delicate and accomplished mind. In the present case, so intimate and like-minded were they, that the narrative derives much of its beauty from the congeniality between the subject and its narrator. The only fault is one, into which a stranger could not have fallen. Some of the more obvious features of Mr. *McCheyne's* character are hardly noticed. To Mr. *Bonar* they were so habitual that they had ceased to be observable. They would have impressed a stranger. The ordinary aspect of the man, his in-door life and daily walk, his manner of conversation in the world and among his Christian friends, such scenes as have seldom transpired, except in the prayer-meetings and at the communions of St. Peter's, more of his sayings and deep remarks on Scripture, and, if possible, more of the special instances of his success in winning souls, we should have gladly obtained, and some of these a distant on-looker would have been apt to give. The work does not absolutely lack these things, and it possesses the surpassing value of revealing the interior growth of that eminent piety which produced his eminent usefulness. And altogether, the memoir is a faithful and affecting record of as beauteous a character, and as effective a ministry as He who holds the seven stars has exhibited to the Church in these last days.

“To give this article a practical tendency, we may be allowed to mention what we believe to have been the secret of Mr. *McCheyne's* uncommon usefulness. The subject is seasonable, at this time when so many ministers, and elders, and private Christians are inquiring by what means they may extend their personal efficiency, and become, in the hands of the Spirit, the agents in adding to the Church of such as shall be saved. From what we know of Mr. *McCheyne*, and have read in these Memoirs, we are persuaded that next to his habitual dependence on the Spirit of God, the occasion of his uncommon success was *the consistency and conspicuousness of his Christian character*. He lived in the eye of his people. Though his house had been a glass-fronted cabinet, they could scarcely have been more minutely cognizant of his movements and whole manner of life. They knew that his week days were but a sequel to his Sabbaths, and what they saw him in the pulpit, they found him in his study and among his friends, by the way-side, and in their own houses. He was everywhere ‘the man of God.’ His preaching was impressive, for his life applied it. His every day demeanour exemplified and adorned his doctrine.”*

Such is the attestation of the contemporaries and intimate friends of this extraordinary man, who had marked his spirit, and listened to his instructions, in public and in private for years together, in all the various circumstances which “try men’s souls.” Can any one who appreciates the value of Christian character, doubt that such an example ought to be portrayed for the benefit of the Church and of the world; and that

* The Presbyterian Review and Rel. Journal. No. LXV. July, 1844. Edinburgh.

such a spirit ought to be studied as deeply, and recommended as widely as possible?

One of the most promising and gratifying features in the present aspect of the Free Church of Scotland, and one of the most precious pledges of the blessing of God on her noble enterprise, is the evident revival of a spirit of vital piety among her members, and especially among her ministers and elders. This revival has gone hand in hand with her faithful struggle for maintaining the truth and order of Christ's house. Nor is the connexion between these two objects of attention either remote or unimportant. For as, on the one hand, the prevalence of vital piety cannot be expected to be found in any church in which the pure doctrines of the gospel are not held fast and faithfully preached; so, on the other, where a sound faith at present exists, it will assuredly, not long continue to be maintained, after vital piety declines. As men are "sanctified by the *truth*," so none but sanctified men will be disposed for any length of time together, to "contend for the truth" and to preach it with simplicity and clearness. In the early history of the Reformed churches of *France*, we find orthodoxy and vital piety maintaining a joint reign to an extent as benign and happy as in any other portion of Protestant Christendom. One of the first symptoms of a departure from their original purity, was a disposition manifested by some of their ministers of questionable piety, to explain some of the articles of the Confession of Faith which they had solemnly subscribed, in a latitudinarian manner. Deviation followed deviation; Synodical bodies began to tolerate serious error; an evangelical *spirit* declined with evangelical *truth*; until, at

length, they ceased to occupy the place and to maintain the character of "witnesses" for "the faith once delivered to the saints." The history of the Church of *Scotland* is in melancholy accordance with the same great principle. With the growth of "Moderatism," orthodoxy and piety sunk together; until "the things which remained were ready to die." At this juncture God was pleased to interpose for her help. Faithful men were raised up; men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" men who remembered the orthodoxy and piety of their Fathers; men trained in the school of experience and of sound doctrine, and willing to give up all for Christ. The sublime spectacle which these devoted men have since exhibited, in abandoning all the endowments and comforts of the established church, for the sake of fidelity to their Master in heaven has been, since the era of its occurrence, the admiration and joy of a large part of the Protestant world. Of this blessed revival and triumph of Christian principle, *McCheyne* and his memoir may be considered at once as a fruit and a specimen.

I write these lines, and recommend this work, my dear brother, under the deep impression that we cannot pray for a greater blessing to our beloved Church than that the mantle of this holy man may rest upon all our Pastors and Elders, exciting them to the zeal, the unceasing diligence, and the entire consecration to their Master in heaven which were so conspicuous in his short course. We need—greatly need large additions to the number of our ministers; but we still more urgently need a higher standard of piety among those that we have. Often, in reading this delightful memoir, have I said to myself, "O, if all the Pastors

of our Church, or a large portion of them, were such as *McCheyne*, as dead to the world as he was; as full of sanctified unceasing ardour to do good to the souls of men; as watchful to instruct and edify the young and the old; as much like Christ in all their habits and efforts—what a different aspect would our portion of the religious community wear? How much more elevated would be the eloquence of our pulpits! An eloquence not growing out of the principles and rules of art, but governed and animated by that heart-felt sense of the infinite importance and preciousness of evangelical truth which never fails to reach the heart. How much more frequent would be revivals of religion! or rather, how much would most of our congregations resemble that of the subject of this memoir, in which those who knew it best have told us there was a gentle, noiseless, but almost constant awakening! If such men presided over all our churches, what a hallowed impulse would be given to the missionary cause, and to all the scriptural plans for diffusing the knowledge of salvation throughout the world! How easy would it be to do without *public agents* for stirring up the people to sustain the cause of Christian benevolence! The Pastor and the Eldership of every church would be a source of hallowed influence in regard to that great cause, adapted under God, to keep every church awake and alive to its claims. *McCheyne*, while he lived needed no body to come in and remind the people of his charge, that the church was bound to send the gospel to every creature; and that every individual member of the church was under obligation to take an active part in this work. The habitual preaching, the public and private

prayers, and the daily example of this heavenly minded pastor were at once a constant memento of their duty, and a powerful stimulus to its performance.

While I lament that there is not more of this spirit reigning among the ministers and elders, and members of our beloved church, I consider the appearance and the popularity of such works as this memoir, as a pledge that the gracious King of Zion will revive us. Some of us who are old and grey-headed, and have been permitted to preach the gospel for more than half a century, so far as the eye of man can discern, have been instrumental in winning much fewer souls, and have done far, far less for the honour of our blessed Master, than this youthful servant of Christ in a ministry of less than a fifth part of the same length. Surely the contemplation of such a portrait as that presented in this memoir, ought to fill us with humiliation and shame.

My hope is, that the great Head of the Church will speedily raise up a race of ministers more holy, more zealous, more wise, more diligent, and more entirely devoted to their work than their fathers have ever been.

Blessed day ! when the watchmen on the walls of Zion "shall never hold their peace day nor night ; when they that make mention of the Lord shall not keep silence, nor give Him any rest, until he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth ; until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly thus to bless thy church and people ; even so, come, Lord Jesus !

With fervent prayers that we may all lay to heart our

duty and our responsibility more deeply than we have ever yet done,

I am, Rev. and Dear Brother,

Your fellow servant

In the Gospel of Christ,

SAMUEL MILLER.

PRINCETON, *September 19, 1844.*