THE

REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS, M.A.,

MISSIONARY TO CHINA.

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REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS.

WILLIAM CHALMERS BURNS was born in the manse of Dun, in Forfarshire, on the 1st of April, 1815. The years of his childhood, spent first at Dun, and afterwards at Kilsyth, in Stirlingshire, passed without anything worthy of special note. They were years, indeed, most favourable to the growth of his intelligence, and to his upbringing in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; but they ran their course without bringing to light any very marked gift or disposition on his part, and without showing that the living seeds of grace had taken root in his heart. At the age of thirteen he was sent as a pupil to the grammar school in Aberdeen, which was then under the rectorship of an admirable teacher, Dr. Melvin. From the grammar school he passed to Marischal College, in the same city, and continued there for two sessions, proving himself a diligent and successful student. Early in 1831 he returned to Kilsyth with all the school and college education he was likely to receive, because it was then arranged, in accordance with his own desire, that he should enter a lawyer's office in Edinburgh, with the view of making the profession of the law the work of his life.

The first steps for carrying out this plan were taken. But before they could be completed, a change occurred which gave a new aspect to his character, and a new current to his life.

A record of this great change, by his own pen, has been preserved in the form of a solemn deposition as before God in regard to a sacred secret, over which, before men, he ever cast the veil of a deep and reverent reserve. He says in it that, "On a sabbath

afternoon, about the middle of December, 1831, an arrow from the quiver of the King of Zion was shot by his almighty sovereign hand through my heart, though it was hard enough to resist all inferior means of salvation. I sat down with solemn impressions to read a part of Pike's 'Early Piety,' which my dear father had given me at leaving home (ah! little did he know what use God was to make of it: little did the author of that solemn treatise know one of the purposes for which he wrote it); and in one moment, while gazing on a solemn passage in it, my inmost soul was in one instant pierced as with a dart. God had apprehended me. I felt the conviction of my lost estate rushing through me with resistless power. I left the room and retired to a bedroom, there to pour out my heart, for the first time, with many tears, in a genuine heart-rending cry for mercy. From the first moment of this wonderful experience I had the inspiring hope of being a sinner saved by a sovereign and infinitely gracious God; and, in the same instant almost, I felt that I must leave my present occupation, and devote myself to Jesus in the ministry of that glorious gospel by which I had been saved. From that day to this, blessed be Jehovah, I have been conscious, more or less deeply, of the possession of a new and holy principle, leading me to live by the faith of Jesus, to the glory of God, and in the communion of the Holy Ghost. Salvation unto our God, who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb!"*

It is not strange that, in his circumstances, one of the first impulses of his new life as a child of grace was to serve God in the gospel of His Son. None who know the sequel of his life from that me-

* For this and other information given in this sketch we are indebted to the interesting work entitled, "Memoir of the Rev. William C. Burns, M.A., Missionary to China from the English Presbyterian Church." By the Rev. Islay Burns, D.D., Professor of Theology, Free Church College, Glasgow. London: James Nisbet and Co. 1870.

morable time, will fail to rejoice and give thanks to God that that impulse of His young servant ripened speedily into a sacred sense of duty.

The joy of his parents' hearts concerning his life and his life-work being thus attained, William C. Burns returned to Aberdeen, to take up the broken thread of his studies, with a view to the ministry of the Church of Scotland. There he carried them on with honourable distinction during two sessions, and took his degree of Master of Arts in 1834. For the theological part of his curriculum he went to the University of Glasgow. His student-life there was marked by great earnestness and mental activity. In the midst of all his studious application he grew in spiritual life; he walked steadily onward in the way of the Lord; he got deeper views of the truth as it is in Jesus; he was quickened and cheered in those meetings and associations of his fellow-students which brought before them the great work to which they looked forward in the church and in the world; and he was led into a fuller consciousness of the consecration which he should make of his life and powers, without stint and without drawback, to the service of Christ. As this term drew near its close he wrote to his sister, saying, "I am approaching, as you know, an era of my history, if we except the time of conversion, the most important that can occur to a human being in this world. Soon must I offer myself, miserable as I am, to the church of God as a candidate for the work of an evangelist; and still more, that church must decide (so great is the honour I have in prospect) whether in this land or among the perishing heathen it shall be my lot to preach to sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ crucified." Still nearer its close, his feelings in the prospect of putting his hand to the work to which he had given himself with all his heart, appeared in the following touching incident: His mother

had gone into Glasgow, unknown to him, on some domestic errand, and was passing through the narrow covered street called the Argyle Arcade, when she saw him turn the corner in front, and advance slowly towards her from the opposite direction, as in deep reverie. Though she went up straight to him, he was quite unconscious of her presence, and started when addressed as from a dream. "Oh, mother!" said he, with deep emotion, "I did not see you; for when walking along Argyle Street just now, I was so overcome with the sight of the countless crowds of immortal beings eagerly hasting hither and thither, but all posting onwards towards the eternal world, that I could bear it no longer, and turned in here to seek relief in quiet thought."

Truly such feelings became him at such a time; for he was then on the eve of going forth openly as a preacher of the gospel, which he did, after receiving license from the Presbytery of Glasgow, on the 27th of March, 1839. The scholarship he had gained, the powers he had cultivated, and the mental discipline through which he had passed during years of earnest and laborious preparation, were then fittingly united with profound impressions of the preciousness of souls, of the realities of eternity, of the grace that bringeth salvation, and of the greatness of the task devolving on those who are called to testify to their fellow-men of the only Name given under heaven whereby they can be saved. The happy omen thus given of the spirit in which he approached his work did not pass away with his entrance upon it. It remained all through as a characteristic of the man. By few things was William Burns more distinguished than by his pervading sense of the magnitude of spiritual interests, and the depth and the power with which he felt the need of giving to these interests the chiefest place in the life of men. Doubtless this was one of the springs of the intense devotion, of the imposing solemnity,

and of the heavenly elevation, which marked his evangelistic labours at home and abroad for nearly thirty years.

In the beginning of the year in which Mr. Burns became a preacher of the gospel, a deputation was appointed to go forth from the Church of Scotland to Palestine and other countries, to inquire into the character and condition of the Jews, with a view to the commencement of missionary operations among them. That deputation consisted of Dr. Black, Professor of Divinity in Marischal College, Aberdeen; Dr. Keith, minister of St. Cyrus; the Rev. R. M. McCheyne, minister of St. Peter's, Dundee; and the Rev. Andrew A. Bonar, assistant minister of Collace, Perthshire. Before setting out on his journey Mr. McCheyne arranged that Mr. Burns should take his place in Dundee during his absence; and Mr. Burns entered into it only two or three weeks after the Presbytery of Glasgow had put him in the number of its licentiates.

The post was a trying one. It was no light thing to enter, even for a season, into the labours of such a minister as Mr. McCheyne; neither was it an easy thing to meet and sustain the interest of such a congregation as he had gathered. Nevertheless, young and inexperienced though Mr. Burns was, he did not shrink from it. Believing that the Divine Master had called him to it, and would be his sufficiency for all that it might require of him, he went to it with good courage, and with holy calmness of soul.

Mr. Burns's regular labours in Dundee came to a close, on the return of Mr. McCheyne, at the end of November, 1839. But how much was crowded into these few months! In preaching the word, in visiting the sick and the sorrowful, in meeting young communicants, in dealing with awakened and anxious souls, in guiding a great variety of religious operations, and in providing for many exigencies of times

and circumstances not usually found in the experience of Christian congregations, his hands were literally filled with labours from day to day.

But his labour was not in vain. The pleasure of the Lord prospered in his hands. From the very commencement of his work in Dundee he was cheered by signs of the gracious presence and blessing of God. Here and there individuals felt the power of the word he spoke. Tokens of spiritual awakening among the young of his flock began to appear. A deepening solemnity showed itself in the assemblies of the congregation. By one manifestation after another it became plain that times of refreshing were come to them. That refreshing came in showers of blessing. Anxious inquirers after the way of life were multiplied. Crowds pressed forward with uncommon eagerness from day to day, to listen to the message of saving mercy. Meetings for prayer and for Christian fellowship sprung up on every side. An overpowering sense of sin took hold on many who had apparently lived in indifference, and constrained them to cry out for mercy. The naming of the name of Christ, and the forsaking of sin at the word of Christ, told of very many who were giving their hearts to Christ. The prevailing tone of religious converse, and the prevailing aspect of religious observance, showed that the springs of spiritual life in the people of God were receiving fresh impulse. Throughout the whole community in Dundee, and in the district around, it was felt that a great movement, of which St. Peter's church was the chief centre, was going forward; and, as time went on, and the results were proved, it came to be the conviction of those who observed it most closely that it was a movement which the Spirit of God had created in the minds and hearts of men by the power of his grace and truth.

After Mr. Burns had laboured in Dundee amid much hopefulness and encouragement for a season,

he returned on a visit to his father's flock at Kilsyth. Being desirous of reaching those who absented themselves from the house of God, he gave notice that he would preach in the Market Place. As the weather was unfavourable for meeting in the open air, the parish church was opened, and the people poured into it in great numbers. When Mr. Burns entered the pulpit, he found the church crowded to the utmost. He preached on the words, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

In a record drawn up about a year later, he said, after giving an outline of the plan of the sermon, "I was led to allude to some of the most remarkable outpourings of the Spirit that have been granted to the church, beginning from the day of Pentecost; and in surveying this galaxy of Divine wonders, I had come to notice the glorious revelation of Jehovah's right hand, which was given at the Kirk of Shotts in 1630, while John Livingstone was preaching from Ezekiel xxxvi. 26, 27, when it pleased the sovereign God of grace to make bare his holy arm in the midst of us, and to perform a work in many souls, resembling that of which I had been speaking, in majesty and glory. In referring to this wonderful work of the Spirit, I mentioned the fact that, when Mr. Livingstone was on the point of closing his discourse, a few drops of rain began to fall, and that when the people began to put on their coverings, he asked them if they had any shelter from the drops of Divine wrath, and was thus led to enlarge for nearly another hour in exhorting them to flee to Christ with so much of the power of God, that about five hundred persons were converted. And just when I was speaking of the occasion and the nature of this wonderful address, I felt my own soul moved in a manner so remarkable, that I was led, like Mr. Livingstone, to plead with the unconverted before me instantly to close with

God's offer of mercy, and continued to do so until the power of the Lord's Spirit became so mighty upon their souls as to carry all before it like the rushing, mighty wind of Pentecost! During the whole of the time that I was speaking, the people listened with the most riveted and solemn attention, and with many silent tears and inward groanings of the spirit; but at the last their feelings became too strong for all ordinary restraints, and broke forth simultaneously in weeping and wailing, tears and groans, intermingled with shouts of joy and praise from some of the people of God. The appearance of a great part of the people from the pulpit gave me an awfully vivid picture of the state of the ungodly in the day of Christ's coming to judgment. Some were screaming out in agony; others, and among these strong men, fell to the ground as if they had been dead; and such was the general commotion that, after repeating for some time the most free and urgent invitations of the Lord to sinners (as Isaiah lv., Rev. xxii. 17), I was obliged to give out a psalm, which was soon joined in by a considerable number, our voices being mingled with the mourning groans of many prisoners sighing for deliverance."

This was the beginning of what was speedily known throughout Scotland as the Kilsyth revival of religion. For some time it went on amid abounding ministrations of the gospel, and unusual copiousness of prayer. The darkness of many minds was enlightened. Dull consciences were awakened. Hard and stony hearts were softened. Sin was forsaken. The name of Jesus was felt to be as ointment poured forth. A fresh ardour of zeal and love and holy affections breathed from those who had long known the grace of God in truth. On every side there were those precious blossoms and fruits which the word of God and the history of the church point out as coming from the grace of God in Jesus Christ,

as due to nothing else than the life-giving and renewing power of the Holy Spirit of God. Many witnesses of this have spoken, and their testimony has been thankfully received by very many who prayed that the Spirit of God might be poured out as in the days of old.

After his retirement from Dundee, near the close of the year 1839, Mr. Burns spent about four years and a half in doing the work of an evangelist throughout different parts of Scotland, England, and Ireland.

His visit to Ireland was near the end of that period. It was very short, and was confined to Dublin, where he preached daily. In some of the open-air services, which he held in front of the Custom-house, he found the crowds not only unsympathizing, but hostile and turbulent, and ready to deride and assault him. On one occasion they threatened to throw him into the river; when he told them that he did not mind that, his Master had been treated worse. On another occasion the ferocity of the mob was so great that the police ordered him to be silent and cross the river in the ferry-boat, and said, "For if you attempt to go back along the quay, we will not be answerable for your life." He left that city without seeing any fruit of his labours, and with his spirit deeply stirred because of the multitudes within it to whom he strove to carry the message of the gospel.

His visit to England was about the middle of the period named above. It was given chiefly to the large towns of Sunderland and Newcastle-on-Tyne, and extended over several months. In the latter town his labours, at first, were discouraging. The apathy and evil which confronted him seemed greater than he had seen before. All his attempts to break in upon them appeared, for a season, to be in vain. But being strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, he continued resolute in the work, before

what he described to one of his friends as an "iron-walled citadel of Satan," and as a city in which there was "the sleep of death." By the distribution of tracts which he had specially prepared, and by his preaching in churches, in the streets, and market-places, and open spaces of the town, he succeeded in arresting the attention of thousands to the word of life. More than once, indeed, he suffered reproach and violence in this labour of love. But he held on without wavering, rejoicing in the assurance that he was not alone, and rejoicing in the hope that the Lord would give testimony to the word of his grace. And ere he left he beheld signs of deep impression and of religious awakening, where formerly nothing but darkness and coldness had been.

Mr. Burns passed the most of the period already named in Scotland. His labours spread over a very large part of the country. But they were spent mainly round four distinct centres, namely, Perth, Aberdeen, the Highlands of Perthshire, and Edinburgh. From each of these points he went forth over a large territory around, into towns, and villages, and hamlets, preaching the gospel in churches, in tents, in school-rooms, and in the open air, in season and out of season, and seizing the varied opportunities which these tours gave him of speaking privately to those who came in his way of the things of their peace. Whether he was at one of these centres, or whether he was moving through the regions beyond it, three things were made manifest. One of them was the spirit of zeal and love, the spirit of faith and prayer, and the spirit of energy and hope with which he gave himself to the work. Another was the readiness with which he was received almost wherever he went, the willingness of godly ministers and people to co-operate with him in seeking a revival of spiritual religion, and the general diffusion of joy on any appearance of fresh religious interest and animation as the fruit of his

visit. And another was the rich blessing which seemed almost everywhere to attend his labours, the obviousness with which he became the means, in the hand of God, of breaking up the spiritual indifference of large numbers of persons in various ranks of life, of pervading great assemblies with unwonted solemnity, and of stimulating true servants of the Lord to higher degrees of Christian character and work.

To Mr. Burns, as to thousands in Scotland, the year 1843 was, ecclesiastically, a very trying one. When the critical day, the 18th of May, came, Mr. Burns cast in his lot with those ministers and people who formed the Free Church of Scotland.

After that memorable event, Mr. Burns continued labouring as before in different parts of the country. But soon he began to feel that the new circumstances in which it had placed the people were less favourable than formerly to the special kind of work for which he believed himself to be best fitted amongst them. This made him the more ready to listen to invitations to go forth into new fields.

Such invitations came to him in great force in the autumn of 1844 from different parts of Canada, where the tidings of the revivals in Kilsyth, Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen, and Breadalbane had excited deep interest. Gathering from them that it was the will of God that he should preach the gospel in these regions also, he set sail, and reached Montreal at the close of September. For about two years he remained in Canada. During that time Montreal, Quebec, Toronto, Bytown (now Ottawa), Kingston, Coburg, Picton, Hamilton, London, Glengarry, and most of the chief seats of population, received more or less of his ministrations. Sometimes he was roughly handled and stoned. At one time he applied himself with all the zeal of a student to the renewal of his acquaintance with the Gaelic language, and at another time to the improvement of his knowledge of the French language, in order that he

might declare unto men in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. And always he was abundant in labour, sparing not himself in the city, in the field, in the distant settlement, by the highways and hedges, if by any means he might win some souls to Christ. The memory of these days is still fragrant in many of the districts where they were passed. Many persons to whom they were days of power from on high still remain to testify of the same. And there are instances not a few, of churches and congregations to which they brought special quickening and joy. When they were over, he returned to his native land.

Before Mr. Burns left the Divinity Hall in Glasgow, his mind had been strongly drawn to the foreign mission field. So deeply had he felt the claims of the heathen that he regarded it to be his duty, when the way should be opened up, to go unto them and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He looked upon himself, and his father and friends looked upon him, as publicly devoted to that work, and as waiting to receive a call to it from the church. While in that position, the request came to him from Mr. McCheyne to take charge of his congregation in Dundee. That engagement, and the marvellous line of engagements with which it was followed, for a time put the foreign field into the distance. But they did not put it out of his view. They did not weaken his purpose to enter on it. In the midst of them, even at the most engrossing times, he spoke and acted as one who was holding himself in readiness to go far off to people who were dwelling in the land of the shadow of death. While labouring with his might, as one thrust forth by the Lord of the harvest, in fields immediately before him which were white unto the harvest, he kept alive in his heart the consciousness that the first dedication of his life and labours had been to the service of Christ in regions where He had not been

named. And so, when the impression was deepening in his mind that the first special work to which his hand had been guided was finished, his original purpose came up with fresh force, and by one step after another the way to its fulfilment was made plain.

Early in February, 1847, Mr. Burns received a letter from the late Rev. Dr. Hamilton on the part of the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in England, earnestly requesting him to become the first missionary of that church to China. Some difficulties which lay in his path were happily surmounted. Some difficulties which for a moment seemed to imperil the establishment of the mission were also happily removed. And when Mr. Burns, strongly pressed in spirit regarding it, arrived in Sunderland on the 21st of April, to confer with the Synod, it was found that he and they were of one mind, to go forward and bear their part in the evangelization of the vast empire of China. On the following day his ordination took place in the presence of the Synod, in circumstances of deep solemnity, to the joy and rejoicing of many hearts.

Mr. Burns reached Hong Kong in the November of the same year. He remained there two years and three months. For the first year his work was of two parts. On the one hand, he preached once every Lord's Day to a small congregation of his own countrymen engaged in the mercantile establishments. On the other hand, he set himself to the study of the Chinese language. His natural faculty for the study of language was quickened by his intense desire to find access to the Chinese people with the word of life. To the ordinary helps to the mastery of their language he added the closest possible intercourse with the Chinese people. He left a European family, and dwelt in a hired house in the midst of the native population, where he lived almost entirely in the element of Chinese thought

and Chinese speech. "He spoke Chinese, wrote Chinese, read Chinese, heard Chinese, sung in Chinese, prayed in Chinese. Far into the night sometimes might his voice be heard reciting aloud the words of life, or pouring out his heart before God in the broken accents of that strange tongue which, for Christ's sake, he had determined with as little delay as possible to make his own." The very first use which he made of his command over that strange tongue was to read and pray with poor prisoners who were lying under sentence of death for murder. Rude and feeble though such ministrations were, they were congenial to his heart, and were in keeping with the whole spirit and tenor of his evangelistic work. Though they consisted but of stammering words and broken sentences, he uttered them because he knew that, by the grace of God, they might shed some glimmerings of the saving light of gospel truth upon these darkened minds.

As months passed on, Mr. Burns found the barrier which language raised between him and the people breaking completely down, and he got a fuller acquaintance with their habits of thought and ways of life. Accordingly, he resolved to leave Hong Kong, with its comparatively small community, in which there were Christian missionaries and British and native Christians, and to go to the great field teeming with people on the neighbouring mainland. The resolution was bold. The course to which it committed him was unusual and perilous. Whether, and how far, he might be able to persevere in it, it was impossible to tell. But he went forward. Taking with him native assistants and a servant, he went through the towns and villages which are thickly strewn over that part of the coast of Southern China, with no other object than that of making known to the people, by tract and by speech, the gospel of the grace of God which has appeared unto all men bringing salvation. Nothing could be

simpler than his mode of procedure and his manner of life in this new field. "As soon as he reached a village, he commenced to read his Bible aloud, say, under the shade of a tree; soon the villagers began to gather, and he explained to them the nature and object of the gospel. Usually some one would ask him at meal-time where he was to eat. And he as usually partook of what was set before him by some hospitable villager. As evening approached, some one would offer him a night's shelter; and thus he often went on from week to week, preaching the word and lacking nothing."

The experience which Mr. Burns gained in these earliest attempts to evangelize the Chinese, corresponded with that which he afterwards gained on a much more extensive scale. So far as his work was concerned, that experience had two aspects. One aspect of it was encouraging; for he often found the people friendly, attentive, and interested in the gospel message. But another aspect of it was discouraging; for sometimes the people were suspicious, the officials were hostile, one door after another was closed against him, and he was robbed and stripped of almost all that he had. And so far as he himself was concerned, he went about under the depressing consciousness of the danger to his own spiritual life, whilst alone in the midst of a people without a Bible, without a sabbath, and without any distinct knowledge of the one only living and true God. At the same time, he felt deeply that the vast field into which he had gone was hard, and that his labour in it was only like the labour of one ploughing in hope and sowing in hope. He said, "Were it not my abiding conviction that the Lord hath sent me there, and that His grace can be made sufficient for us in all circumstances, I would sometimes be overwhelmed when regarding the state of this blinded people, and the danger to which my own soul is exposed in dwelling among them. From

day to day I have enjoyed many tokens of the Lord's guiding and supporting hand; but while this is the case, I cannot say that, as yet, I have seen any clear indications in the state of this people that the day of their spiritual deliverance is at hand. In other days it has been my solemn privilege to enter into the labour of others, and it may be that here I am to labour where others are to reap."

The whole course of Mr. Burns's labours in China after this period was marked very much in the same way. They reached from the coast line of the great province of Southern China to its chief city, Canton; from Canton to Amoy, where he acquired a new dialect, had his head-quarters from July, 1851, till the beginning of 1854, and whence he went on preaching excursions into the towns and villages on the mainland, as far as to the great city of Chang-chow; from Amoy to Shanghae, whence he attempted to reach the Taepings, who were then in great force at Nanking, and whence also he carried far and wide into the surrounding country the good seed of the word; from Shanghae far southwards to Swatow, the centre of a district in which he thought the people were more blind and hardened in idolatry and sin than in any place he had visited, and where the usual features of Chinese civilisation were coupled with a barbarity in certain circumstances which he had not seen nor heard of anywhere else in China; from Swatow back to Amoy and Chang-chow; thence to Foo-chow; thence, after journeys to other places, to Peking, whither he went for the special purpose of endeavouring to obtain for Protestants the same recognition of their civil rights as the Roman Catholics; and thence, in the autumn of 1867, to New-Chwang, where he died on the 4th day of April, 1868. But, through all that territory, and during all these years, the experience of Mr. Burns closely resembled what it was at the outset of his missionary career on the coast near Hong Kong. Any difference

which appeared in it was, in its essential features, merely a difference in degree.

Seven years passed away before Mr. Burns had more signs of encouragement in his arduous and diversified toil in China than these; viz.—access to the people, their willingness to hear the gospel, their desire to be taught the Word of Life, and various modes in which they showed that their interest in spiritual things was awakened. But he did not see that the gospel had really taken hold of any to whom he had preached it during all that time. He knew not of one instance of conversion unto God. Among all to whom he had spoken the message of salvation there were none who came forth from the darkness and desolation of their heathenism, and professed their faith in Jesus Christ, and walked in newness of life. There was no ripening and no gathering of the fruits for which he had gone into that great vineyard. There were none to whom he could say, "Ye are our epistle: ye are our glory and joy."

But that long time of trial, through which the toil of the missionary was sustained in hope, and his heart was strengthened by his faith in the promises of God, and in the power of Divine grace and truth, issued in a cheering light. That light broke forth in 1854, in the populous villages to which he went from Amoy, as his chief station. In Pechuia and Bay Pay, he had the joy of witnessing that some to whom he spoke in the name of the Lord Jesus not only heard, but believed, and forsook their evil ways. Mr. Doty, an American missionary, who was in the district at the time, said, "Of a few, hope is indulged that they have really passed from death unto life. Numbers have renounced their idols. Some have burned and destroyed them. Others have given them to the brethren to be thus dealt with. I found such an awakened interest and spirit of inquiry as I had never before met with among Chinese. It did seem as if the Holy Spirit was at work. The most

marked cases are of young men of some education, and endowed with considerable zeal and energy. These are very active in efforts to awaken the attention of others." Mr. Burns himself, animated by these signs following his labours, wrote thus: "What I see here makes me call to mind former days of the Lord's power in my native land. In *my own* circle of observation I have hardly seen so promising an appearance of the coming of God's kingdom since I came to China. You will see from what I have stated that there is indeed much to encourage prayer and effort in behalf of this benighted people; and that we have also cause for admiring thankfulness to our covenant God and Saviour. In my own experience the Lord's goodness is so great and increasing, that while friends in Scotland may look upon me as an exile, I feel as much at home here as I would wish to do on this side of the Jordan."

Quietly and happily did he spend four of his last years in Peking—from 1863 to 1867—preaching in the open air, co-operating with the missionaries from England and America, ministering in English to the mission families, itinerating in the surrounding country, and completing such works as a translation of "The Pilgrim's Progress;" a book of Scripture Lessons, to some extent founded on "The Peep of Day," but designed for older readers; a volume of Hymns; and a translation of the Psalms from the Hebrew, arranged in four-word sentences, with an introduction to each Psalm, and many text-references to the New Testament and other parts of Scripture; all in the Mandarin dialect, for use in the capital and the north.

The necessities of New-Chwang, and its relation to the great territory of Manchuria lying beyond, drew him to it in the autumn of 1867, and there he found himself the solitary representative of the Protestant churches. His heart was cheered with the opportunities of services which presented themselves. But

the end was at hand. His race was nearly run. His course was well-nigh finished. Feeling that his strength was sinking, and like one hearing a voice which was calling him away, he wrote the following touching words, on January 15th, 1868:

"To my Mother,

"At the end of last year I got a severe chill, which has not yet left the system, producing chilliness and fever every night; and for the last two nights this has been followed by perspiration, which rapidly diminishes the strength. Unless it should please God to rebuke the disease, it is evident what the end must soon be; and I write these lines beforehand to say that I am happy, and ready, through the abounding grace of God, either to live or to die. May the God of all consolation comfort you when the tidings of my decease shall reach you, and through the redeeming blood of Jesus may we meet with joy before the throne above!

"Wm. C. Burns."

"The tide of life," to quote his brother's words, "now gently ebbed away. He spoke little even on those subjects that were dearest to him, lying for long days and nights in silence that was broken only by the soft footsteps of his Chinese assistant, and by the voices of the worshippers, from time to time, in the neighbouring room, in which it was his delight to know that his loved work was still going on. His peace was calm and deep, but undemonstrative, like that of the river which speaks only by its silence, and by the soft whispering of the reeds, and lapping of the waters on its banks. 'He did not speak much,' wrote the Rev. A. Williamson, 'on religious subjects, either to Chinese or foreigners; and when he did, the burden of his remarks was that he was prepared to die or to live, as the Lord might determine.' 'About a month after the commence-

ment of his illness,' says another friend who often visited him at this time, 'he began to apprehend its fatal issue, but said he was quite prepared. After six weeks or so, his fresh looks began to leave him. The brightness of his eye faded, and gradually he became like an old decaying man.' Yet now and then the old fire would, for a moment, awake, and impart an expiring energy alike to his voice and frame. 'Finding a decided change for the worse, and great distress in breathing,' his friend repeated several portions of Scripture; among others, Psalm xxiii. Hesitating at the words 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,' Mr. Burns took it up, and in a deep strong voice continued and finished the Psalm. He also greatly relished John xiv., and on closing the exercise with the Lord's Prayer, Mr. Burns suddenly repeated the latter portion and doxology, 'For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,' with extraordinary power and decision. This was the last time he manifested any power of mind. Afterwards he evinced only recognition; and at last hardly spoke, or even opened his eyes. Thus he passed away."

To a very large extent the life-work of Mr. Burns was that of a pioneer. The circumstances of his time, and his own view of his personal qualifications, and of the leadings of God's providence, constrained him to move from field to field, both at home and abroad. And so it came to pass that from the commencement of his preaching days till their close, he was very much like one whose special work was to prepare work for others; to open up doors by which others might enter in; to break up ground in which others might sow; and to sow where others might reap.

The immediate results of such labours, however, were great. They were so especially in Scotland, where, during the few years of his ministry remarkable revivals of religion followed his labours in Kil-

syth, in Dundee, in Perth, in Aberdeen, and many other places, the blessed fruits whereof continue in many ministers and congregations until this day. They were so also relatively in China. For, although the number of individuals whose conversion to God and whose Christian edification could be instrumentally traced to him in China was as nothing to their number in Scotland, yet, in itself, it was not insignificant. And over and above all that, there was a most precious influence on the side of the gospel and the kingdom of Christ, flowing from the force of his character and from the tone of his conversation. That influence was felt by missionaries and English-speaking Christians, by native Christians and inquirers, and by others wherever he went, from Canton to Peking and New-Chwang. It gave an impulse to spiritual life and to missionary zeal, and it led many in the dry and thirsty places of that far-off land to thank God that the footsteps of William Burns had been directed to them.

But the more remote results of his labours are, perhaps, greater still. It is difficult to speak of these with precision, because it is difficult to trace the countless ways in which the waves of spiritual influence spread from heart to heart. Yet it is well known that the leaven which was cast into the Christianity of hundreds and thousands in Scotland in 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842, has not ceased to work; and that not a little of the purity, and love, and devotion of Scottish Christian life at the present moment, is to be associated more or less directly with great numbers of persons in all ranks of life, to whom these years were years of singular blessing. And as for China in this respect, there can be no doubt. For, besides the lasting benefits which will accrue from Mr. Burns's translation of the Psalms of David and the Pilgrim's Progress, and from his composition of hymns and spiritual songs in several Chinese dialects, there has been a large reaping of

souls where he sowed the precious seed. There has been much building on foundations which he laid, and there has been a great entering in of labourers into districts to which he called them. At Amoy, at Pechuia, at Swatow, at New-Chwang, and in the surrounding parts, the present state of the missions bears witness to these things. The growing interest of the Presbyterian churches in England, and Scotland, and Ireland, in China as a mission field, may be fairly cited as a witness to the same. So that while Mr. Burns's personal labours were directly blessed to the winning of souls to Christ from among the teeming myriads of China, they were also eminently blessed to the enlargement of the means and agencies by which the churches of Christ in that empire have been multiplied and strengthened; and, through them, another pledge has been given to the faith and hope of all God's people throughout the world, that there will be a fulfilment of the words of the prophet: "Behold, these shall come from far; and lo, these from the north, and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim."

The truth which Mr. Burns taught, and upon which the Divine blessing abundantly rested, was the good old doctrine of the gospel. He spoke to men of their sins and their hearts, of their dangers and their miseries; he told them of the grace and glory of God in Jesus Christ; he set before them the way of pardon, and peace, and everlasting life through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost; he proclaimed to them the absolute need of repentance, and faith, and holiness; he urged them to flee for refuge, and lay hold on the hope set before them while it was the accepted time and the day of salvation—as these great things are set forth in the word of the truth of the gospel.

Through his preaching and his work as an ambassador for Christ, there breathed the spirit of intense devotion. That devotion was kindled by the grace of

the Spirit of God in his heart. It was fed by the faith and the love with which his own soul clung to the Saviour whom he preached unto others. It was quickened by the great power which Divine truth acquired over his mind, so that the things of which that truth testified became, in a remarkable degree, realizations to him. It was sustained and hallowed by that prayerfulness which kept him habitually waiting upon God, and seeking that the power of God might rest upon him for the doing of that work which, without the power of God, would be done in vain. It was strengthened by the deep yearning of his heart in love to the souls of men, in desire for their salvation. It was ennobled by the singleness with which his eye was set on the glory of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. And so it carried him forth as a man who had but one thing to do, to live and to work for Christ, and for men for Christ's sake. Hence the spiritual-mindedness which shone so manifestly in him. Hence the zeal and steadfastness, the perseverance and the earnestness which characterized him. Hence also the humility, the self-abnegation, the patience, and the absorbing application which marked him all through his chequered, but most blessed course. No wonder that devotion so Christ-like as his, and that labours so rich in spiritual fruits as his, have made the name of William Burns very dear to thousands, and that they will make his memory long fragrant in the hearts of thousands as the memory of one in the company of those of whom it is written, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

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