



MY START IN LIFE.



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HALFPENNY

MY START IN LIFE.

THE simple and unvarnished narrative of how I was converted to God, may not only be a subject of interest to many, but may be the means in God's hand of awakening some careless souls who, out of curiosity, may trouble themselves to read this ; and also of carrying peace and blessing to some weary, anxious, sin-sick, Saviour-seeking sinner. If God be pleased thus to use it, the object will be accomplished for which it is penned and sent forth, and all the glory will be His both now and forever.

“ This month shall be to you the beginning of months ; *it shall be the first month of the year to you* ” (Ex. xii. 2). Such was God's message to Israel when He went to deliver them from Pharaoh's bondage and bring them to Himself. Their *New Year* was to date from the time they were sheltered from judgment *in* Egypt by the blood of the lamb ; and then redeemed *from* Egypt by the power of God (Ex. xii. 14). My birthday, or New Year's day, I date back to May 2nd, 1869, for on that day, through grace, I began to live to God, and made “ My start in life.”

When I speak of "My start in life," I mean in the spiritual life. All the previous part of my history was spent in sin, and therefore calls for but small notice. Theatres, concerts, racecourses, and sundry other amusements, with a pretty regular attendance at chapel on Sundays to please my professedly religious parents, made up the sum total. A sad total after all! God, Christ, heaven, hell, eternity, all shut out! But God *freely* forgave me—*abundantly* pardoned me—cast all my sins into the *depths of the sea*—and seeing He will "*remember them no more*" (Heb. x. 17), our wisdom will be to follow His example, and pass on to the way I reached this wonderful blessing and made "My start in life."

It was my custom every Sunday after dinner to call for my companion and then saunter off together and spend our afternoon in the fields. His uncle and aunt with whom he lived were professing Christians, and one Sunday as we were leaving the house his aunt said to us, "I think you had better go to the Drill Hall this afternoon and hear Hay M'Dowell Grant preach." This was met by a sneering laugh and the retort that chapel morning and evening was sufficient, and

we were not going to any such place, and away we marched for our accustomed round. However, after sitting awhile in the fields, we concluded we would go, just to see what was going on.

When we arrived there the place was crowded, and, to our surprise, several young men whom we knew were giving out the hymn-sheets and helping in other ways at the service. The preaching itself, however, fell on deaf ears, so far as we were concerned, and merely expressing our surprise at the numbers present, and the young men whom we concluded had turned religious, we went away as careless as we had gone.

The following Sunday afternoon again found me calling for my companion, and again we were asked to go to the Drill Hall, but this time it was to hear the Rev. William Haslam. With a scoffing remark about church parsons, we turned on our heels and made for our old haunts in the fields. But God had His eye upon us! His "set-time" had come! And this was to be, for me at least, the never-to-be-forgotten-day in my history, my birthday, "My start in life."

We had not sat long before a strange and unaccountable desire came over me

to hear this clergyman preach ; so, jumping up, I said, " Lord, here J——, I'm going to hear this parson at the Drill Hall." " Come on then," said he, to my surprise, " We'll go and hear what the fellow has to talk about," and off we started.

The place was well filled by the time we arrived, but, somehow, we found ourselves pushed well up in front of the platform, with hymn-sheets in our hands. I kept looking about to see where the parson could be, expecting every moment to see the reverend gentleman appear in gown and bands, never dreaming for one moment that a clergyman of the Church of England could or dare stand up to preach without them.

Several gentlemen sat on the platform, but the absence of gown and bands, or anything emblematical of the clergyman, made me still look round and wonder where this reverend preacher could be ; when, suddenly, I was startled by a cheery voice saying " We'll sing that hymn, ' We'll win the day.' " I gazed in astonishment on the man, and when he started the tune himself and carried it with a swing, I confess I was breathless, and, turning to my companion, I whispered,

“I say, J——, this fellow’s a Ranter! He’s not a church parson, surely!”

That afternoon I was taken by storm. Everything was so different from the weary, hum-drum of the reverend celebrity whose ministrations I still felt compelled to attend, and whose prayers I almost knew by heart. The singing was different, the preaching was different, everything was different. His address too was interspersed with several striking incidents of conversion (a thing which, till then, I thought only Methodists believed in), and all told in such a homely, lively, taking way, that I felt I could understand all he had to say, and I was delighted, and whispered to my companion at the close of the address, “Isn’t that splendid? That’s the best preacher ever I heard in my life.”

When he announced that he would preach again in the evening at the Tyne Theatre, I determined at once that I would go; but all my powers of persuasion to induce my companion to accompany me were in vain. However, I found another young man willing to go, and that evening found us seated in the pit of the theatre, I eager to hear again this taking preacher.

To this day I cannot tell the text he preached from, but I remember being struck with the number of gentlemen on the stage along with the preacher, and the thought flashed through my mind, "Dear me! all the people in Newcastle are turning religious! I only wish I was too!" This was the extent of my knowledge at the time, that to reach heaven people must *be religious*.

In the course of the preacher's address he related a circumstance which took place in Cornwall, and *that*, with the hymn sung at the close, made a lasting impression on my mind. I will relate it as I remember it.

A certain man who had risen from the ranks at last died, leaving a fair amount of money and property to his son. Some time after the son came of age, and a great feast was made, and many guests invited. The wine flowed freely; toast after toast was given, and the greatest demonstrations of joy were visible in that house of merry-making and feasting. Presently the young gentleman rose to respond to the toast of the evening. He thanked them for their kind wishes, responding to all that had been said; and concluded with this awful sentence—

“Gentlemen, I mean to be a rich man, suppose I go to hell for it.”

The effect of this blasphemous and startling announcement was visible on the whole company, and a shudder ran through many a frame; but the wine quickly drove away the feelings which had been produced, and with many it was soon forgotten.

Time wore on, and with this young man business and money-making became the all-absorbing occupation of his life. He was true to his determination, expressed on that memorable night, “I mean to be a rich man, suppose I go to hell for it.” Business increased and money flowed in. Everything he put his hand to turned to gold. He was certainly a successful man.

One day, however, a stranger called on him and would not be denied. His name was *disease*. He was followed by a still more unwelcome visitor named *death*. These two made their calls, and, in spite of all the pressing engagements of this sinful though successful man, he was laid low to listen to their preachings, and profit, if he would, while there was yet time. But, alas! All the lessons and all the warnings fell upon deaf ears—ears

that only heard music in the chink of gold, or the rustling sound of bank-notes and cheques; while eternity, with its heavenly joys, or its unending horrors in hell, were all ignored in the fatal determination to be rich, even though he lost his soul as the result of his folly!

The Doctor was sent for at once, but the case was beyond all medical skill; and the patient was warned that if his affairs were not settled it had better be done at once, as it was but a question of hours. On hearing this he started up in the bed, and looking at the Doctor he said, "Doctor, keep me alive till Thursday and I'll give you fifty pounds!"

This Thursday was what was known as "ticketing day" in the Mineral Market, and he expected to make a great deal of money that day.

The Doctor replied, "My dear sir, neither money nor skill can keep you alive here beyond a certain time, and the best thing you can do is to prepare for another world."

"Doctor! Keep me alive till Thursday, and I'll give you a hundred pounds!"

The Doctor shook his head.

"Five hundred!" cried the dying man. "You *must* keep me alive till Thursday!"

“A thousand! if you’ll do it,” he cried again in his excitement.

The Doctor did his best to soothe his patient, but all was unavailing. He started up in the bed, cursed and swore at the Doctor, and ordered his servant to pay him his fee and shew him to the door.

As the end approached the scene became awful. Servant after servant left the room and refused to go near it again. At last an old man-servant, who had been in the family for years, left the room, and, with tears streaming down his face, he said: “Oh, I can bear to hear my master curse and swear; but *I cannot* bear to hear him speak of what he sees and hears, *I cannot* stand it,” and even the old man refused to enter the bedroom again.

After all had become quiet, and death had evidently ended all for this world (for *after* death the judgment, Heb. ix. 27), they entered the room, when a fearful sight met their gaze. There lay the body of the wretched man, half in the bed and half out, the most awful look of horror stamped upon the features; while the sheets and blankets were torn into ribbons. When the funeral was over, and his affairs were settled, it was found that he had left a million of money. His vow

was kept. He died "a rich man," but he went "to hell for it."

The narration of that circumstance by the preacher and its effects I shall never forget. It was the turning point in my life, the thing God used to my soul. While I listened I trembled. Then I tried to pray. Then fear took possession of me, until, at last, when the address was concluded, and all engaged in silent prayer to ask God to bless the word spoken, I felt as though I must cry aloud for mercy. All my wasted, sinful, and misspent life seemed to come before me, and I felt myself to be the greatest sinner out of hell, and the wonder was that I was not there. When the hymn was given out, I learnt the first verse by heart while it was being sung; and, though my heart was breaking, I sang it with all my might. It was just the expression of my inmost soul—

"Depth of mercy! can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood His grace;
Long provoked Him to His face;
Would not harken to His calls;
Grieved Him by a thousand falls."

Had I been slain for singing that hymn, sing it I must, and sing it I did; and for

a whole week no other song of any kind escaped my lips. I prayed too, oh, how I prayed and besought God to spare me and I would be different, and turn over a new leaf and be good. These and all the various other things which anxious sinners usually tell God when they are found out in their sins, I told Him then. Never shall I forget that night in that theatre! Never! Reader, have you ever found out you are a guilty sinner? God grant you may find it out ere it be too late.

As the congregation began to disperse, I longed to stay with the anxious enquirers who were invited to remain; but just then Satan brought his weightiest arguments to bear upon me. "Your companions will laugh at you. You couldn't be a Christian two days. Besides, J. R. will not stay behind. Don't be a fool. You can be religious at home without waiting to let them talk and pray with you." These, and various other arguments of a kindred nature were pressed upon me by Satan, with overwhelming force, and at last won the day; and, coward that I was, I began to move slowly, but sorrowfully towards the door. Many a lingering look did I cast upon the company who waited behind. Like Lot's wife, I

looked back for my heart was there. Had any friendly hand been laid upon my shoulder then, and a kind voice asked me to stay, I think I would have done it; but, alas! none was there, and soon we found ourselves in the street, wending our way homeward.

The current of my life was changed from that night. I had made "My start in life." That a new life had been imparted to my soul was self-evident, for the things I had loved I now hated, and those I had hated I now loved. And the struggle of the whole of that week to refrain from sin and serve God, testified to the fact that I was "born again" (John iii. 3). It was not mere fear of consequences which influenced me, for could I have been assured there was really no such thing as punishment for sin, my hatred of sin itself would still have remained, for it was the result of the new life within me, implanted by the Spirit of God (John iii. 5).

The details of the week, with its meetings and conversations with one and another, I need not here relate, even if I could remember it all. Sunday came at last, and found me attentive to all the services of the day, but no peace or rest

was brought to my weary and sin-burdened soul.

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I was standing outside the chapel gates talking to two or three friends after the evening service, when an old Sunday school teacher of mine, a very earnest Christian, came up, and, taking me by the hand, said, "Well, W——, are you saved yet?"

"No," I replied; "I only wish I was."

"What is it that hinders you?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you candidly. I can't *feel* that I'm saved, and I won't say it till I do."

"Ah! I see where you are making your mistake," he replied. "You are putting *feelings* in the place of *faith*. Suppose now you were thirsty and I held a glass of water to you, do you think you would feel your thirst quenched *before* you drank it or after?"

"Oh, after!" I replied.

"Well then," continued my friend, "You must *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ *first*, then the feelings will follow after."

"I see that," said I, my eyes beginning to open to my folly; and after a little more conversation we parted.

That evening as I walked down the street, my mind wholly occupied with the question of my soul's salvation, so intense was my anxiety that, unconsciously, I found myself speaking out aloud and saying—"Lord, I *do* believe, help Thou mine unbelief." Then I turned to reasoning with myself. I said, "I *do* believe that Jesus died for *me*—that He died for *my* sins. Oh! if only I could *feel* I was saved, like others, I *should* be happy." Then the prayer would start to my lips again, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."

I had not gone much further (the spot I know right well—yea, the very stone upon which I stepped at the moment—and just as the town clock was striking nine), when I again said to myself, "I *do* believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I *do* believe He died for me!" The words had scarcely passed my lips when it seemed as though some one whispered at my side—"He that believeth on the Son, HATH everlasting life" (John iii. 36). Instantly I said, "Glory to God! THEN I'VE GOT IT, for HE SAYS SO!" And with that I leaped into the air and cried again "*Glory to God, I've got it, He says so!*" Then I took to my heels and rushed

along the street like mad, as though my limbs had been bound all my life and I had only just got them loosed. Then I came to a dead stand and cried again, "*Glory to God, I've got it, He says so,*" for He says, "He that believeth on the Son, **HATH** everlasting life," and I believe, therefore I have it, and with that I began to sing, but my song was now changed, "*Depths of Mercy*" was discarded, and

"Happy day ! happy day
When Jesus washed my sins away,"

took its place, and for a whole week again no other song was sung by me save those hymns given out in the meetings I attended. I had realised the blessedness of being saved and "*Happy day !*" was the fitting expression of my feelings.

I returned home with a heart full of praise and that night I was able to thank the Lord as I kneeled at my bed-side, that *He said* I had eternal life. And as I laid my head on the pillow I looked up to heaven and said—"Thank God, if I die to-night my soul will be in glory with Christ for I am saved." Reader, have you experienced the joy of a saved soul? If not God grant you may while yet it is "The accepted time" and "The day of salvation," or you will certainly

experience the eternal remorse of a lost soul in hell.

It had been arranged that an evangelist, whom I had heard one evening the previous week, was to come to the chapel for three weeks, commencing on the Monday evening. O, how I longed for the evening to come. It seemed as if the day would never come to a close. However, it came at last and found me in my place at chapel thirsting to know more about the One who had saved me.

For the visit of that evangelist I shall ever have to thank God. From him, under God, I learnt the eternal security of every believer (John v. 24 ; x. 27-30), and numerous other precious truths of Scripture. He encouraged us to mark the passages in our Bibles, and, if we could not quickly enough find them out, to write them down and examine them at home. And never have I known any one who acted on that text—2 Tim. iv. 2 —“*Preach the word,*” more than he did. Thus, through mercy, I was thrown upon the bare Word of God itself, and I became acquainted with the very language of Scripture at “My start in life.” From *it* I learnt the truths that gave me solid, settled peace ; and from that time till

now, not a doubt or question as to my salvation has ever been raised in my soul. How could they when "The Word of the Lord abides forever" (1 Pet. i. 25), and He says I have eternal life. One can only exclaim, "What hath God wrought" (Num. xxiii. 23).

Christ's work on the cross settled, and settled forever, the question of my sins and my evil nature also (see Heb. x. 12-18; Rom. viii. 3). And when I say "my" it means of course *every believer* in the Lord Jesus Christ also. God was satisfied, yea glorified by that work; the resurrection of Christ being the public seal of that satisfaction (Acts xiii. 30; 1 Cor. xv. 4); and the witness that every believer is justified (Rom. iv. 25). Not only so, we are before God *in Christ Jesus*, and will be forever (Eph. i. 4). Moreover, "There is now no condemnation" for us (Rom. viii. 1), and we are "New creatures" in Him (2 Cor. v. 17). The coming again of the Lord Jesus is the true Christian *hope* (John xiv. 1-3; 1 Thes. iv. 15-18); and *the Word of God* in the power of the Holy Ghost makes all these things known to us. Feelings, experiences, &c., are the *effects* of salvation; while all Christian service begins *after* we have

obtained *eternal life*, and not before. This last being insisted on by the Apostle in Titus iii. 8—"These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that *they which have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works.*"

And here I close. The record of all my little service for the Lord since I made "My start in life" is kept on high, and will be made known in *that* day, when all will be seen and estimated according to its true value. Till then may both writer and every Christian reader be found cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts xi. 23)—"Serving the Lord with all humility of mind" (Acts xx. 19)—with our loins girded and our lights burning, and *like men* that wait for their Lord (Luke xii. 35, 36).

But should the reader be unsaved let me plead with you to accept Jesus as your own Saviour while mercy's door stands open and you can be saved. Soon that door will be closed. What if you should find yourself outside? "O, turn ye;" Jesus waits to save *you*—let Him do it. Trust Him with your soul. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou* shalt be saved;" and *there*, and *then*, you, too, will make *your* start in life. Till then you are

in a state of spiritual death, and exposed to eternal judgment.

W. E.



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