

Correspondence.

OPEN AIR PREACHERS.

NO. IV.

ROWLAND HILL.

BY EDWARD PATSON HAMMOND.

“PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE,” was the last command of our risen Lord. In seeking to obey this commission, the preacher of the Gospel finds two distinct departments of work open before him. He has first to win souls to Jesus, and thus make disciples of them, and then instruct them in the ways of holiness.

As an ambassador for Christ, he has first to induce men ignorant of the Gospel, or careless about it, to listen, and then to learn. He may find assemblies gathered in churches and ready to hearken to the words of eternal life, but in that case, a preliminary work has been done for them, which has not been accomplished for the great majority in our land. We read that when our Saviour “saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.” Then said He unto His disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.”

He who truly reflects the image of His Saviour, can but feel something of that divine “compassion” in his soul as he looks upon the multitudes without a shepherd, scattered all over our broad land. The true pastor will not only take care of those gathered from the dark mountains of sin, but will also at times, feel constrained to leave the “ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost.” Of necessity, some must enter on other men’s labors, and reap where others have sown, but is it not equally urgent that others break up fallow ground?

Have not too many so-called prosperous congregations seemingly forgotten that the lost must be sought after, and followed, and “compelled” to come in?

Farmers make but little progress when they have no care to break up the fallow ground. Isaiah’s prophecy declared that “the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.” But how are we to see this prophecy fulfilled unless there are those who are willing to go forth into “the wilderness” scattering “the good seed,” believing that though some “tares” may appear, there will also be found there “the children of the kingdom” to “rejoice even with joy and singing?”

REV. ROWLAND HILL was one of those who saw before him the two distinct spheres of labor to which reference has just been made. He loved to preach to the people of his charge in Surrey Chapel. That place which he had erected, was dear to him, and there he continued except at intervals, to hold up the standard of the cross till 1833, when he died in his eighty-ninth year. But though he for so many years sustained his relation to his beloved people, he was often moved with compassion for those scattered as sheep having no shepherd. He longed to see “the wilderness blossom as the rose.” He saw the blessed results of open air preaching as conducted by Whitefield, and his soul was fired to follow in his footsteps.

Dr. Belcher uses very strong language with regard to the blessing which attended his labors. He says, “He was eminently dignified in person, possessed extraordinary zeal, and was honored by his great Master with probably more success in the direct work of saving souls, than any other minister of his day.” Like Whitefield, he was educated for the ministry in the Established Church, but could not yield to the restraints there imposed upon him. He would preach wherever he could find an opportunity.

His father, a gentleman of title, was greatly opposed to his speaking to the rabble in fields and parks. At a time when Mr. Hill was depressed, on account of the frowns of his honored parents, who deemed him “righteous overmuch,” Whitefield wrote to him, “If I am not mistaken, the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls will let the world and his own children too know that he will not be proscribed to in respect to men, or garbs, or places. I wish you very much prosperity—you will have it. This is the way, walk ye in it. I pray for you night and day. This present opposition cannot last long; if it does, to obey God rather than man, when forbidden to do what is undoubted duty, is the invariable rule.” Rowland Hill acted upon this advice, and feared not to “go forth without the camp;” and saw verified the words of Isaiah, “Then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

After preaching in Bristol, he writes— “A gracious gale through mercy, attended all day. Who would not be a slave for Jesus Christ?” On the morning of the following day he preached at Kingswood, and “in the evening,” he says, “he renewed field preaching in Bristol to some thousands, upon Acts iii. 19. ‘Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.’” The word was with power, the people were deeply attentive, and a great blessing seemed visibly in the midst of us. I am

fully satisfied as to field preaching. I know the Lord puts honor upon it.”

In the year 1793, Mr. Rowland Hill (as his biographer states) paid his first visit to Scotland. He was invited there by a few zealous persons who had engaged the circus in Edinburgh as a chapel, on the plan of the Tabernacle in London. They requested Mr. Hill to come and open it, and spend five or six weeks with them. He was pleased with the idea, and readily acceded to their request. The circus had been secured for one year only, by way of experiment, and it was agreed to fix the hours of service at seven o’clock in the morning and six in the evening, that there might be no interference with the regular attendance of persons at their own place of worship; a plan of which Mr. Rowland Hill entirely approved.

On the day after his arrival, Sunday, July 29, he opened the circus. His text was the prayer of Moses, Exodus xxxiii. 14, 15, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” In the morning the attendance consisted of only a few hundreds, but in the evening the place was full. His subject was, I Cor. i., 22, 23, 24, and he “employed some time in showing Paul’s method of treating the proud Corinthian hearers.” “How very different,” he proceeds, “is the immediate and direct simplicity that is in Christ! How lovely in its effects, while the minister preaches just as he feels, wisely regulated by the word of God, and warmly animated with a desire to bring salvation to the sinner’s heart!”

The singularity of Mr. Rowland Hill’s manner, the fervor of his address, and the brilliant powers of his active and energetic mind, soon drew vast multitudes around him. The circus, large as it was, could not contain half the numbers who flocked to hear him; and they cried out that the galleries were giving way under the pressure of the crowd. He accordingly went forth to the Calton Hill, where he preached from a platform to a mass of people amounting to at least ten thousand in number. The spot was well adapted to such a purpose; the platform was placed in the centre of a sort of natural basin, and the green slopes which surrounded it were covered with innumerable, immortal beings, silent as the breathless evening of autumn, fixed in deep attention to the words that issued from the sonorous and commanding voice of the speaker as he delivered, in all the majesty and dignity of his office, his message of mercy to the lost and ruined sinner. The retiring of the multitude under the most solemn impressions, was indeed a touching sight; every person seemed deep in thought, and numbers were for the first time absorbed in the concerns of their souls and of eternity. The old women as they looked out of their doors at the slowly passing stream of human beings, observing a party of soldiers among them, exclaimed, “Eh, sirs, what will become of us now! What will this turn to! The very soldiers are ganging to hear preaching.” It was always a principle with Mr. Rowland Hill, to expect great things from his labors: “While we are straightened,” he says, “in our expectations, the blessing is withheld; but when our hearts are enlarged, the more we ask the more we have.”

Rowland Hill’s second visit to Edinburgh was marked by an increase even of the immense crowds who had previously flocked to hear him. On the Calton Hill he now calculates the numbers at fifteen thousand, in addressing whom, his principal aim in his sermons was to alarm the sinner.

The last time he preached on Calton Hill, it is supposed the congregation amounted to nearly twenty thousand, though the rain threatened.

He thus expressed the feelings of his mind on the occasion: “to be clear from the blood of such a multitude, and to declare to them the whole counsel of God, what wisdom and grace does it require!”

In the autumn of 1860, it was my privilege to stand on that same Calton Hill, so full of interesting associations. There met my eye the tomb of David Hume, on which was the simple inscription—

“DAVID HUME,
Born 1711,
Died 1776.”

Above, upon a beautiful vase, was the name of his wife, with the words, “Behold I come quickly. Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As I stood gazing upon these words, and thinking of the contrast between this believing wife and her infidel husband, I was much impressed with this fact, then stated to me by a resident of Edinburgh. Just before dying, Mr. Hume called to a nephew who was a believer in Jesus, and said to him, in a jesting manner, “Place my tomb on the highest part of Calton Hill, that I may be the first to hear when the last trumpet sounds.” His Christian nephew answered, “You forget, uncle, ‘The dead in Christ shall rise first.’”

Ah, yes, when “the hour cometh in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation,” when the thousands who on Calton Hill listened to the burning words of Rowland Hill, and received with faith the Lord Jesus, whom he preached, “shall be raised incorruptible,” “when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,” then shall David Hume learn the inspired truth— “The dead in Christ shall rise first.”

What a contrast between the death of the infidel historian and that of Rowland Hill, who was ever ready to obey the command of the Master: “Go out unto the highways and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled!”

During the last few years of Hill’s life, he used frequently to repeat those words which Whitefield loved so much—

“And when I’m to die,
Receive me, I’ll cry,
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why.
But this I do find,
We two are so joined,
That He’ll not be in glory and leave me behind.”

He was enabled to preach the blessed Gospel with “scarcely diminished power until within a few weeks of his death.” But when at last in his eighty-ninth year, he came to the borders of the “grave in full age, like as a shock of corn in his season.” As he lay apparently unconscious, gasping for breath, a friend put his mouth close to his ear, and repeated slowly his favorite lines—

“And when I’m to die,
For a moment the fading light beamed again in his eye; a smile played upon his pale face, and while attempting himself to articulate the words, his ransomed soul took its flight

“Through the wonder-teeming space,
To the everlasting portals—the spirit’s resting place.”

LETTER FROM CHAPLAIN ARMSTRONG.

Sensations and Reflections on becoming a Soldier—Power of the Oath, and the “U. S.” on Domestic and Patriotic Feeling—A Brave Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment—Single Combat and Death of a Rebel—Kind and Christian Treatment of the Fallen Alabamian—The Soldier who received Lizzie’s Famous Letter—Leading to his Conversion—Appeal for Reading Matter.

HEADQUARTERS 4TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY, NEAR LOUISVILLE, KY., Dec. 21st, 1864.

Dear Brother Mears—You may be not a little surprised to be hailed by the writer from “away down South in Dixie.” Perhaps not more than I at the fact. Church-building and soldiering are not the same, but you and I know that in these days our government makes soldier out of all crafts of men, as our Lord made his first disciples soldiers of the cross.

It came about thus. It was hard to be doing the sober, commonplace business of life, when I last took your hand, and looked upon your beautiful City of Brotherly Love. This was just when Grant was marching down by the “Wilderness,” towards Richmond, just as the summer heats were coming, and the summer green was growing deep, and rich, and I knew that thousands of our soldier-brothers were bleeding and dying, and my pulse would not be still. Well, I worked on, and said to my restless heart, “wait.” But every dispatch from Grant would almost make it wild again, and the news from Sherman (“Crazy Bill”) as he pursued his war-path southward, in his unparalleled campaign, would raise a fever heat. I applied the ordinary pacifics and worked on, till at length, just as autumn’s golden haze was coming, on the 1st of September, to my own surprise, I awoke and found myself a soldier.

Can you, my brother, appreciate the significance of a metamorphosis from a citizen to a soldier? Let me tell you that the world becomes another world, and the war another thing from the standpoint of a soldier. Soldiering is a stern reality. It makes the war quite a different enterprise from what you saw from the distance of your peaceful home. It takes away the romance. It gives it a deeper and more positive coloring than it had as seen in the daily papers, or on a cursory visit to the army, or even in the character of a six months’ delegate of the Christian Commission. Put on the hat and coat of a soldier, after the oath to serve three years, and you are another man. Many a mother could scarcely recognize her son in his cap and suit of blue; and stranger still, many a man with difficulty has identified himself as a soldier. Young America has been accustomed to escape too early from his nurses. Is it not one of the many glorious results of the present bloody struggle, that the whole nation has been put into an army, there to learn to submit, learn to obey, to defer to rightful authority? Will not a few years’ discipline in the army prepare us to appreciate Dr. Cox’s exposition of the 13th of Romans, to know the rightful supremacy of law? Will it not dignify the law and make the nation strong? Will it not thus become a warrant for permanent peace in the future?

Aye, dear brother, soldiering in reality is earnest work. From the moment that the “U. S.” is placed upon the man, he is conscious of the metamorphosis. He learns better who, and how great, and how strong, and how dignified, this venerable old Uncle Samuel is; and, if I mistake not, he will, even from that moment, the more deeply venerate and the more truly love and glory in the relationship he bears to that hoary old Uncle. From that moment, too, home, with all its love, its treasures and refining power, has a higher and holier significance. My home, my country, the soldier’s watchwords. Heaven preserve them. Kind angels hover near and scatter smiles and all the richest gifts. Ah! there will be patriots after the war, and lovers of home, and the refinements of society, and the pursuits of peace. Yes, even though you and I have found many in these days who could betray their country with a kiss, or sell it for a mess of pottage—though there were many who

did not know the value and power of the home-born sympathies, and of the sweet restraints of society, and though some may be weaned away from these, yet thousands of our soldier brothers and boys will return from campaigning to the delights of domestic and civil life, with a thousand fold higher appreciation than of old.

But, my brother, I did not begin this letter for a homily, or for the purpose of moralizing upon the war, but to open another medium of communication between Pennsylvania and a body of her finest soldiers, namely, her Seventh Cavalry. This noble regiment has been brigaded with one of Michigan’s regiments, Fourth Cavalry, under Col. R. H. G. Minty, and together with the Fourth regular cavalry they have done a great amount of hard marching and fighting, and have won laurels with their noble commander from more than a hundred hard fought fields of battle. In the month of September last I joined the brigade as chaplain of the Fourth Michigan Cavalry. I found then, and during the long and arduous campaign following, no other chaplain in the entire brigade, and I became acquainted with only one other in the whole division. I learned, subsequently, that not only this Seventh Pennsylvania regiment, but several others in the division, have chaplains, who, however, by reason of sickness and for other causes, are absent from their charges. Of course my own direct labors have been with my own regiment; but I have been able occasionally to issue a ration of reading matter through the entire brigade, and I have at my own services, and elsewhere, made the acquaintance of valuable men of the Seventh Pennsylvania, both officers and privates. I am glad to find some positive Christians, men who carry Christian principles with them in the army.

The following incident may illustrate this truth. In a spirited fight at Rome, Ga., in which the First Brigade covered itself with glory, among the examples of personal bravery was the following. Two brigades of rebel cavalry made an attack upon our division. The First Brigade (which was then our designation) was ordered to a sabre charge. (These regiments are armed with the Spencer carbine, a seven-shooting gun, as well as the sabre.) They went forward with that fearful yell and rush that ever attends the charges of these regiments. The enemy was broken and fled in confusion, their artillery fell at once into our hands, and though probably not less than twice or thrice our number, our boys pursued them, flying in all directions, through fields and over hills. In the pursuit all manner of encounters occurred, and among other personal bravery was the following. Two brigades of rebel cavalry made an attack upon our division. 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