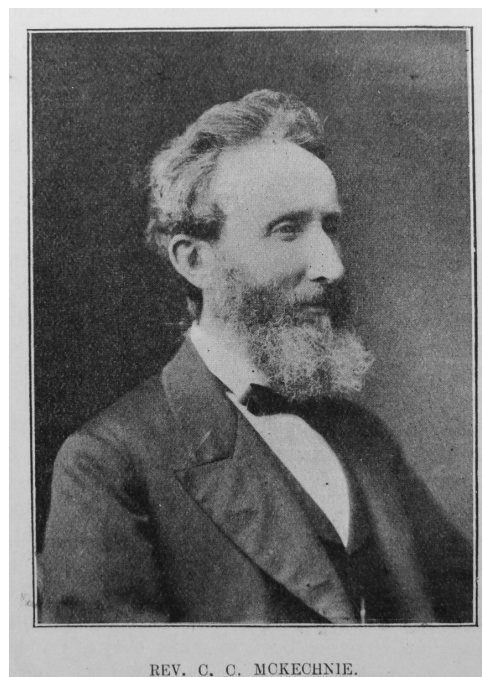


Wonderful Conversions - James Weatherburn

Transcription an article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev C.C. McKechnie

THE revival commenced with the conversion of a notorious character—James Weatherburn. James was a Scotchman, of fairly good natural parts, well educated, and knowing his Bible pretty well, but a drunkard, a swearer, a complete moral wreck. Being skilled in engine work, Mr. Sopwith had brought him from Newcastle to construct some new engines at Sparty Lea. Everybody knew Jemmy—knew him as one of the cleverest and also one of the most outrageously wicked and immoral men in the Dale.

Hearing some rather flattering reports of the new Scotch preacher he went to hear him at the Town Chapel—more because he was a countryman than from any higher motive. By God's blessing the Word aroused him and aroused him terribly. He went home distressed, distracted, horrified with himself and with his apprehended doom. All the following week the billows rolled over him, and he felt utterly, hopelessly undone.



REV. C. C. MCKECHNIE.

The following Friday night he found his way again to the Town Chapel where I was preaching, his distress, if possible, becoming worse and worse. He stopped at the prayer meeting, the first unconverted person who had done so for a long time. He threw himself down in utter, heart-broken abandonment. I spoke kindly to him, but he really seemed beyond my reach. No, he could not hope there was any chance for him. What black and bitter things he wrote against himself. At length, after groaning and struggling for a while he said, "O dear, I must go, I cannot bear this; O, I am undone, I am lost. No, I cannot stay, I cannot bear it, I must go." And with a terrible effort he managed to crawl out—literally crawl—for his legs seemed paralysed.

From Friday night till Monday his condition cannot be rendered in words. So desperate was he that on the Sunday evening he went into the fields with a razor in his pocket intending to cut his throat. On the Monday night he got to the preaching at Allenheads. When I saw him, I said to myself, "Thank God, we have him now!" My preaching was directed that night almost entirely to him. But what was my disappointment when at the close of the service I saw him hurrying out. I, however, got to the door first, took his hand in mine, and entreated him to remain. No, he resisted my entreaty, and I felt almost broken-hearted, for I had confidently reckoned on his conversion that night.

And yet, that very night he was converted, Hurrying home, in a state of mind not to be described, he threw himself on his bed, not knowing what to do. He tossed to and fro for a while, awfully distressed, till at last his thoughts took a turn which led to his deliverance. He thought of me, of the anxiety I had manifested for his salvation, and especially of the kind hand-shaking and the kind words at the close of the service that evening. And he reasoned thus: "If Mr. McKechnie cares for me so,

and shows me such affection, must not God whom he serves also be my Friend?" And so he went on reasoning from the servant to the Master until a flood of light burst upon his soul, he surrendered himself to the love of his God and Saviour, and there and then entered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Next day he came out into the world a new man. The change was semi-miraculous. All things were new, his appearance, his speech, his actions—all had undergone a complete transformation. And the effect upon the countryside was electrical. Everyone knew of it, and everyone felt moved by it. The converting influence ran like electricity; the two dales were wrapt in that strange sympathetic feeling so often noticed in great revivals. Conversion became the order of the day. Allenheads was the headquarters where the work culminated and centred, but it spread over the whole of the two dales, until some four or five hundred souls were gathered into our church, to say nothing of the Wesleyan harvest.

One evening at Allenheads, while preaching to a crowded congregation, the feeling, though kept well in restraint, became awfully, overpoweringly intense. Just when about the middle of the sermon, a tall man of perhaps about fifty-five, standing at the top of the gallery, uttered a terrific scream and fell on the floor as if shot. It proved the moment of his conversion, and from then till his death, about some six or seven years after, he lived in the light and joy of the Gospel. This man was the father of Mr. Joseph Reed, of Newcastle, who had got converted a few days before.

In not a few instances two, three, and even four of a family got converted at the same time. These scenes, as may well be credited, were very affecting. I well remember the night when Stephenson Stobbs and his sister Mary surrendered to Christ. The poor father and mother were fairly heart-broken with joy. What a tumult of ecstasy there was among us that night—for the brother and sister were the centre of quite a little crowd, who with them that night started for heaven.

As is usual at such times, a number of big boys got converted, and, what is more uncommon, quite a number of very old people. Several who had entered their seventies were amongst the converts, and their conversion was in almost every case singularly clear and satisfactory. One of this class living at Sparty Lea struck me as a marvellous example of the power of the Gospel. He seemed to be made wholly over again, body as well as soul. From being a miserable, shrivelled, grub of a man, he became God-transformed and God-intoxicated. He breathed a heavenly life, he was always in heaven or near it." Look," he said to my colleague, one day, as they sat at tea, "Look, don't you see the angels swimming in the tea? They want to dwell in me, and to make me a little heaven. I have heaven in me, Jesus, the Angels—yes, yes, heaven begun below." Thus he lived and died.

For thirteen weeks, during the severest weather I ever knew in Allendale, the revival services were kept going. Hard work, yes, but glorious withal. Many a joyous, almost triumphant journey I had between Allenheads and the Town through snow and tempest at the midnight hour, after several hours of revival work. How my heart used to leap up with the joy of victory on returning from my work after a lot of souls were converted.

My feet scarcely touched the ground. And what joy I carried to others. The good folks at the Town were on the look-out for me to hear the news. They would not go to bed till satisfied-with hearing of

fresh conquests. And when I told my tale they were wont to make the welkin of the old town ring
with their songs of joy.

References

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