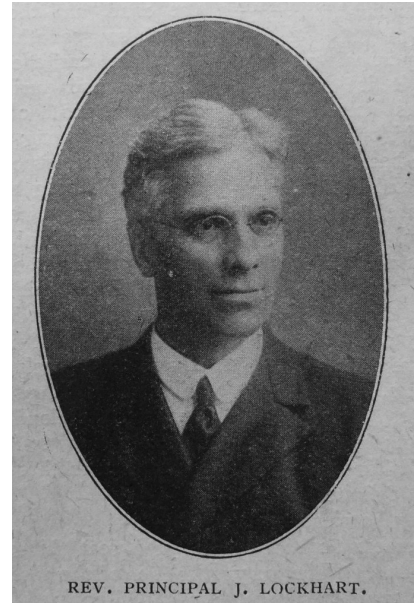


## My Testimony

### Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Principal James Lockhart

I WAS converted in a revival. The general judgment on revivals today is critical. They are mistrusted and condemned for being wantonly emotional, unstable in results, and artificial and secular in method. These are inferences from a few examples, and illustrate the logical fallacy of raising the particular to the universal. Many individuals have been carried into the Kingdom on a swell-tide, who would not have yielded to the ordinary wave-beat. It was in a revival with a lady evangelist and organised services that I, as a youth, made the great resolution. The antecedents of this crisis are clearly preserved in memory. From my youth upwards, I had given an enforced attendance at church and school, but these had made no arresting appeal, nor gained any determining influence. The drift and direction of my mind were setting out towards a life of vice. Against this, my past training, self-respect and moral inheritance would have protected me, but the tendency was towards an attitude of religious indifference.



My conversion occurred at the age when a young man begins to feel the pressure of life, and thinks of the future. It is the birth-hour of individuality. He is given the reins, and knows he must drive. Confidently he takes them. Ambition is also born, sometimes of the desire to excel, or of love, and sometimes quickened by the social rivalries or examples of successful men around him. He is now an individual, an independent unit with a future waiting on his will. The world is offering him much, but it is also denying him much, which can only be won by striving. Then comes to him sharply a challenge to decide his position in society—his means of livelihood, prospect of marriage, and his settled grade among his fellow-men. This is immediate, urgent and unescapable. Afterwards — somewhere later in the programme — that vague and disquieting solicitation called religion will receive attention. First the natural, and then that which is spiritual. This is the rational order of life. For the present, ambition — heavy-winged, but with unlimited driving power — concentrates and urges him. My vocation limited my thought and purpose. With a youth's jaunty judgment, religion was declared untimely, impracticable, remote — at least not urgent. It was in the programme, a duty and a content of life, fair-flowered and fitting, but to unfold later. Across an attitude of drift like this the revival broke, and dislocated old plans and dreams, setting up a kingdom within. The new had more vividness than the old, hence easily displaced it. My conversion was not an experiment, but a full and conscious committal. There was no hesitation, reserve or parleying with the flesh or the world. The invading life was accepted by irresistible conviction and possession.

It is interesting, decades after, to look back on this crisis like Paul, and study the process and the things that emerged. For this was a conversion—a change and a contrast. Evolution in the direction of the dominant desire of this period would not have, brought me to a religious fellowship. My disposition was not anti-religious. There was no sense of revolt, even against an enforced attendance

at church. The terms in which some doctrines were expressed in those days made thoughtful young men rebel, and the physical expressions of religious emotion seemed excessive. Defects of order and manners sometimes offended, but there were different and greater qualities shining from those rude but noble men who surrounded us. We were neither blind nor insensible to their grand parts, and were tolerant of faults of speech and conduct, in our reverence for a godliness that we felt and feared. My disposition was therefore not irreligious, but had taken a direction of small deflection at first, which would have hardened into religious negativism. From this I was awakened, turned round and concentrated.

The demand upon early adolescents that they should accept their position in the Kingdom and Church of Christ, involves crisis, but not of necessity conversion. There may not have been induced any wrong determination of the will or nature. They are psychologically in a state of polarity, held by two poles, without a final response to either, though the virtuous and religious sympathies may be dominant. But in later adolescents there is often distinguishably the need for conversion. In these, definite desires and affinities of the flesh and the mind have emerged into consciousness, and given direction to thought and will. I was eighteen years of age when converted, and had no outward stain or experience of grosser vices. I had lived a clean and sheltered life, but when this crisis came, the change represented a reversal of many desires, sympathies and ambitions. A battle long and persistent had to be fought with old trends of thought and sympathy, before they were brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. In my experience there was crisis and conversion. These produced no conspicuous change in outward conduct, but radical change of mind. Life had gained another objective. It had spacious extension, stood for more, and in the new experiences of forgiveness, assurance, fellowship, and ineffable joy, found a richer content. These were accompanied with a thrill, a wonder, and an intensity—made more intense by their vividness and certainty. All this came not in demonstration to the eye, but sweet enthralment of the Spirit, and elevated the desire to succeed to the desire to become.

This experience brought its own temptations and problems. These gathered round the fact and doctrine of assurance chiefly, and the difficulty of conforming the witness of experience to the teaching of the Church. It was a general belief of those days that this attestation came emotionally. The witness of the Spirit was to the heart and in terms of feeling. How anxiously I searched my heart for the sign and seal of conversion, and what depression and well-nigh despair were suffered when the temperature was low! The days immediately following conversion, with their back-swell of emotion, and the re-actions of over-stressed feeling, left me cold and dry. I interrogated myself, and called upon myself to produce the witness. Division and distress of mind were induced when there was no inward testimony, no heat or glow of spirit. Another hurtful doctrine was sanctioned by our fathers, that the Holy Spirit would withdraw from, and sometimes finally leave, souls that grieved Him. My fears gathered round this tenet lest I had by some unwilling or unwitting act offended His grace and holiness. I did not know and had not been told, that the witness is not to the emotions but of the will. It resides in the conviction that the human and individual will has accepted the higher will of God. Conversion is an executive act, a moral decision, and not an emotional reflux. Every soul is conscious of its own choices and resolutions, and knows whether they are finally and fully set upon Jesus Christ and all He represents. To know that this is the truth about oneself, is to hold in glad certainty the witness of the Spirit. It is a conviction of the mind, not a testimony of feeling.

Other forms of discovery and doubt came because I was uninstructed in the laws and moods of religion, and in my own being. I did not understand that all that had happened was only a beginning, a re-birth. I expected temptation and assaults of the Evil One, but the spiritual warfare I looked for had been copied from Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and had novelty and adventure in it. In that book there was a devil to be circumvented, dangers to be miraculously escaped, and giants and castles to be subdued. The images of my mind were not far removed from the symbolism. I did not think in terms of principles, but of individualised enemies, who used the arts of secular warfare. Much inept counsel is given to young people, because their teachers speak in the figures and conceptions of mature experience, and not through the naive and nascent ideas of an opening mind. I did not expect the old habits of thought and desire, that I had lived with and often disapproved, would persist and return upon me, and that the triumphs of the new life were to be over the sins of the old life. But the familiar faces came back, and the foes I had to front did not emerge mystically, new-born out of the darkness, but were the solicitations and impulses of yesterday. Gradually and only gradually, I learnt that it was these well-known sins that stood between me and God's favour, and my own perfection; and that they could only be cast out by prayer and fasting, and years of combat and discipline. I was conscious not only of an energised distaste and antagonism to them, but a marvellous reinforcement in this inner warfare through the quickening and renewal that had come to me.

Conversion not only reconstructed my life and personality but recreated the world for me. Things that had no appeal and were dull—like Sunday, the Bible, and the Church—became magnetic centres, to which I hastened when liberated, and around which I lived. My social world was vocal with beseeching calls that multiplied activities. Individual men became so many objects for the Gospel's power and grace. Preaching, teaching, missioning, studying and communing claimed my leisure, and experiences were born of this work, which were moments on the Mount, and visions of opened heavens. Nature, too, presented a renewed and revealing face. A renovated soul looks out on the external world with other eyes and more sensitive responses than the unawakened and uncleansed. Was it mythical imaginativeness, that I believed the mornings were more richly silvered, and the evenings had heightened colouring; that there was a deeper note in the bird's song, a fresher glory on sea and land, and that somehow nature and myself had a closer reciprocal fellowship? It was ecstasy at the time to believe these things. The opening of religious life, like the opening of a flower, has a singularity and beauty of its own in the strong emotionalism, the concrete faith, the free imaginativeness, and the abounding spontaneity of those days of dawn, when the soul within is training itself to walk a new road, and re-forming itself after the example of the Son of God.

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1918/540