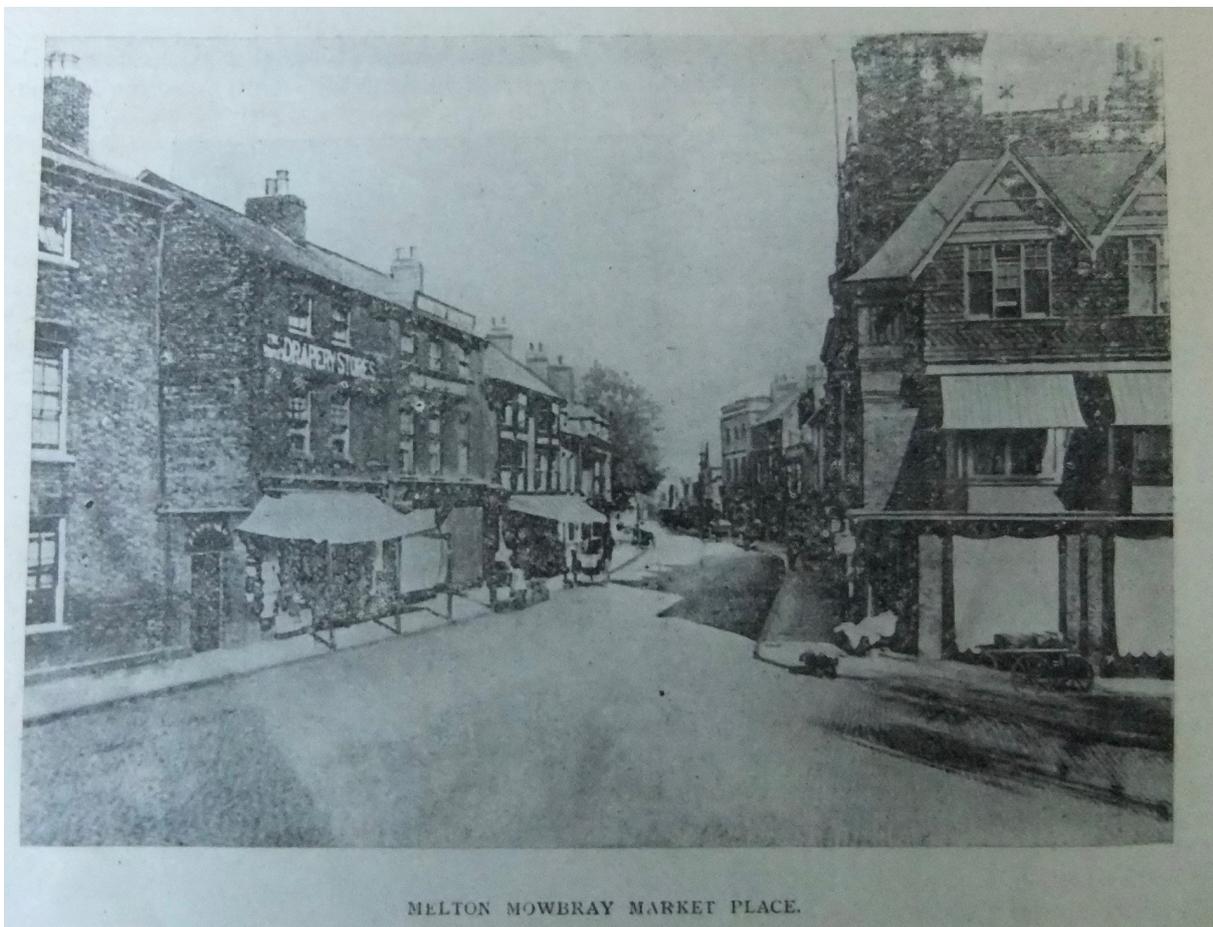


Chapter 12

The commencement of my work at Melton Mowbray was of a very interesting character. Many who were then, pillars in the Church have departed. Some have entered into final rest, while others are scattered abroad almost everywhere. The generous manner in which our people at Melton received me deserves to be placed on record; I cannot easily forget the gracious sympathy accorded in my, to them, strange methods, by those to whom my ministry, in certain features of it, must have been more of a cross than a blessing. The kindly spirit and loving counsel of Mr. and Mrs. Large, Mr. and Mrs. Sarson, Mr. and Mrs. Gill, and many others, I remember to this hour with gratitude. I have often thought since then that the only feature of my ministry in those 'prentice days which could commend it to such people, was my impetuous zeal, a consuming passion to save. I remember also good Mrs. Barratt, whose loving hospitality and mighty prayers oft strengthened both my body and soul when heart and flesh were failing. My heart leaps for joy when I think of her noble and courageous daughters who assisted me in my open-air work when others could not or would not. They were one with me in my efforts to arrest the godless crowds. Night after night have I seen those consecrated souls wipe the foam from their arms and come from the heated workroom to walk by my side through street after street, singing hymns of salvation. Often have we three formed the procession, until the work of God revived and helpers were multiplied.



I commence my work in Melton with a fortnight's mission. The society was rather low in spiritual life. Everyone, and everything, needed the quickening of the Holy Ghost. A spiritual torpor was on the

people of the town. I felt that nothing short of a moral revolution would arouse the unsaved. Cold formalities require a storm of spiritual power to sweep them away. On the first Sunday night of the mission, I told the church that should attack the devil and the sin of the town the next night; and that I should pitch my stand in market-place. Open-air work, I found was in bad repute. My earnest appeal for help to mission the streets met with only one response. Those who had the leisure had not the desire, and those who had the desire had not the opportunity. The date I cannot tell, but it was winter, and the ground was covered with snow. The night was bitterly cold, and the streets were practically deserted. Taking my stand alone in the centre of the market-place, I lifted my heart in silent prayer to God. Casting a swift glance around me, I measured the area, and wondered what impression my tactics would make. My glance revealed behind where I stood a woman standing on the frozen causeway with a babe in her arms. I knew her, having seen her at the service in the chapel. She was a member of the society. It was Mrs. Mackley. Having heard my request the night before for volunteers, she, of all who listened, was the only one who came. Brave woman! To face the snow and chilling blast carrying a tender babe, that she might show her sympathy with God and myself in the work of saving souls, was a worthy act. Though like the women at the cross, she stood some distance away from me, her presence did me good, and in appreciation I mention her here. In a loud, commanding tone I gave out my "war cry":-

"Hark! the gospel news is sounding,
Christ hath suffered on the tree."

Though some other hymns may be more popular with certain people, I do not think there is another hymn that has been more useful in revivals, or led more to Jesus Christ. I commenced to sing. A man who up to this point had been looking into a shop window, turned and stared. It was a new thing. Thinking, no doubt, that it was at joke, and that I was a fool, he came across the marketplace in a very threatening attitude. I could see he was after laying me all my length in the snow. So, with a hurried prayer for God's protection, I turned my mouth in the direction he was approaching, and with all my affection of spirit and power of being, I sang full into his face ---

"Grace is flowing like a river,
Millions there have been supplied."

The man stopped astounded. He seemed powerless to harm me. He listened to the close, and then clapping his hands, shouted, "Encore! Encore! Go on, old fellow; I don't know who you are, but I'll be blown if you can't sing." After the song came a prayer. Then a loving earnest appeal. The influence of that first hymn lingers still. Though sung twenty-two years ago, it still blesses the world. Faith says its music will linger to the end of time. Some who heard it, and felt the Spirit of God in it, have carried the music of its message to other lives. Thousands in the day of the Lord Jesus will praise God that that hymn was ever sung. It was one of the incidents which captivated John E. Wakerley, and which brought God's baptism of blessing and power upon his life. One night in his vestry at St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, he told me what I did not know before; that one of my first hearers that snowy night in Melton Market was his own brother, since then Mayor of Leicester and candidate for Parliamentary honours. Another incident connected with that first hymn still bears its own spiritual interest. Two ladies having left their homes in each other's company, were engaged in shopping up one of the streets branching out of the market. The first notes of the hymn arrested them. They stood for a few seconds and listened. Over the roofs of the houses came the refrain:—

"None need perish, all may live,
For Christ hath died."

“Hark!” said one of the ladies, “some one is singing.”

“Yes,” answered the other, “some poor beggar, I suppose.”

“Really,” returned the first speaker, “but I never heard a beggar sing like that in the streets before. Come, let us go and see who it is.”

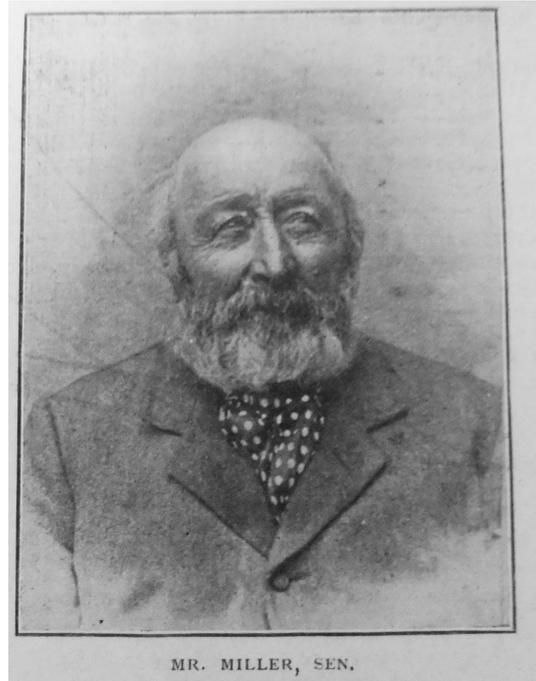
“Oh dear no!” said lady number two, “I can’t be troubled going about the streets listening to vagrants.”

And so they parted, one to her shopping, the other to her — destiny. A few moments afterwards the lady stood on the causeway listening, among others, to my song. She listened while I prayed and exhorted the people to repentance. Deeply impressed, she enquired of a bystander who I was and what my business was. The person enquired of knew my intent, and told her, like the unknown informant of old, “what it meant.” That night around the supper table in her home she told what she had seen and heard. The eldest daughter was so interested, she asked permission to attend an evening service. She came, and at the close of the meeting was found at the feet of Jesus. Others of the family came, until the blessing of God rested upon all. Oft in that home, since then, have I shared in the benefactions of a loving ministry. Some of the children are glorifying God in our churches to-day. There is still another incident related to the singing of that hymn which the reader may like to know. In my long tramps for St George’s Hall, again and again, at the close of some crowded meeting, a hand would be thrust into mine, and a blessing would be given from one who would tell me that they found mercy in those early days. One night I was announced to lecture in an eastern town. The president of the meeting was a fine Christian gentleman. The minister told me he was doing a noble work among the outcast and neglected youths of the district. His generous heart and philanthropic spirit were most commendable and worthy of imitation. To his opening address I listened with the deepest interest while he made the following statement. First, he expressed the extreme pleasure he had in being present at the service, and that for a reason which he would give. “Some twenty years ago,” he said, “I was residing with my parents in the town of Melton Mowbray. One night I left home, my mother being under the impression that I was about to attend a religious service in the Independent Chapel; but my own intention was to go elsewhere. Passing along the main street; I heard someone singing, and drew near the market-place to see who it was. I saw in the centre of the space a tall man singing the closing refrain with which since then I have become more familiar. He then prayed and exhorted the people to be saved. At the close I was deeply affected. My intentions were changed. With tears in my eyes I sought my home door. Entering quietly I went; up to my little room, and by the side of my little bed God pardoned all my sins. From that night to this, over twenty years, I have never seen the preacher. That man,” said the speaker, “was Mr. Flanagan.”

When I heard that testimony, I thanked God. It was another tribute to the working of the Spirit of God in unknown ways. It was an encouragement to sow good seed, whether fruit was seen or not. “They toiled all night and caught nothing.” These are the people we need. Anyone can toil when success is continuous. But it requires a faith grounded deeply in the eternal truth of God to toil through the weary hours of an apparently profitless service. But, lift up your hearts, ye fishers of men. The historic method is the everlasting order. For they who toil all night and catch nothing shall find the morning, and the morning will reveal Jesus, and Jesus will bring the fish. It may be that that old hymn sung that cold night in the streets of Melton will pursue its ministry of blessing and

salvation to the end of time. Evil is short-lived; goodness is eternal. If the lifting of a human hand sends a ripple to the stars, the gentle deed of a lowly heart may change a destiny.

Those first meetings in Melton Chapel left a deep impression on many hearts. Some who now are active in the Melton society found salvation then. Some are serving God in other churches of Primitive Methodism, while others, having kept the faith and finished their course, have gained the crown. Strange scenes were witnessed in the old Chapel. The other Free Churches of the town were revived, particularly the Wesleyan. The saved of the Lord were many. God so filled some young hearts in the Wesleyan Church that their fiery zeal swept all before them. To gather in the outcasts the Temperance Hall was taken. This soon became too small, and the large Corn Exchange was secured. Here, week after week, the glory of God was manifest. The town was visited with a Pentecost.



MR. MILLER, SEN.

Some of the chief spirits of that remarkable revival were converts of our mission. Our beautiful new church and schools at Melton are, no doubt, indirectly the fruit of the revival. I take the following two minutes from the Melton Quarterly Meeting Minute Book:-

"That we record our gratitude to almighty God, for the success with which he has crowned our efforts during the past year in an increase of 120 members."

A little further on is the following:—

"That the number of members be received, viz, 331. And that we report 240, being an increase on the year of 40 members, leaving a reserve of 91."



MRS. MILLER, SEN.

Following upon this revival came the Salvation Army.

Sad to say, they endured great persecutions, owing to some supposed arbitrary action on the part of General Booth. As a consequence they were not only persecuted, but they have failed to grip the masses of Melton to any appreciable extent. One or two incidents of this mission stand out from the rest. One man who had been converted at the meetings, and whose wife, I think, caused him much anxiety, was very anxious, both for, his own peace, as well as her salvation, that she should be saved. He became possessed of the idea that she could only be converted under my preaching. So from time to time he brought her to my services. One night, in a mighty prayer meeting, she arose from her seat, and before all the people, came and knelt at the form for penitents, I at once stopped and spoke to her with a view to help her to the cross. She startled me, and greatly amused the

congregation, by suddenly looking up, and in a fierce tone saying, "Mind your own business, and let me pray for myself." After that I left her severely alone. Soon as she, to her satisfaction, realised pardon, she rose to her feet and went to where she had been sitting. At the close, to my astonishment, the husband stood up before the congregation and burst out with, "Thank yo', mester, for converting my wife." "God help you, man," I said, "it will be a poor job if I have done it."

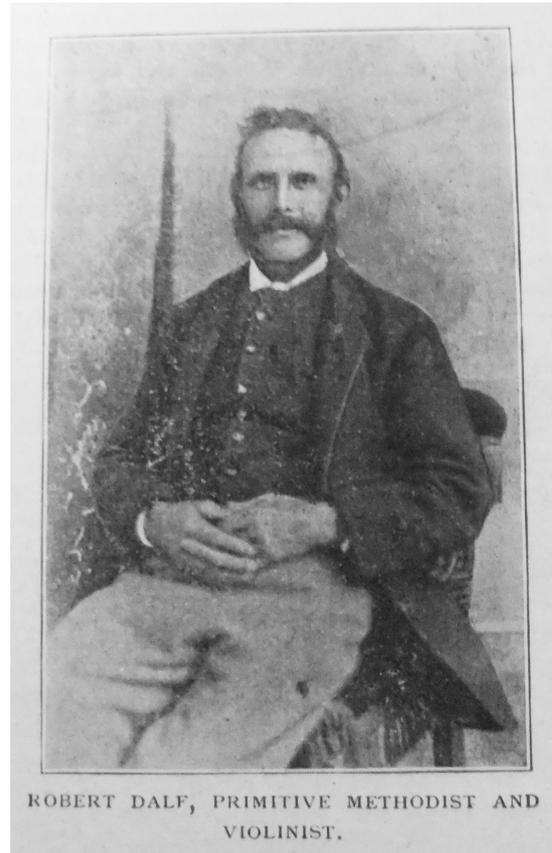
Another incident I remember very well of a man who usually hung around the cattle market on market days. "He was a kind of casual, doing odd work. He was a great drinker, and one day, being under the influence of liquor, the cattle dealers thought they would treat themselves to a joke. Seizing the partially intoxicated man, they threw him across the bare back of a restive horse. Leading the horse into the main road, and turning its head to the town, they placed the bridle-rein in his hand, and with a cut or two of the whip they sent the horse at full gallop down the road. The man had not proceeded far before, drunk though he was, he saw coming up the road some distance away, the then vicar of Melton. The vicar was a fine-looking man, a good preacher, and an Irishman to boot, and as a consequence, tinged with the native wit of his race. "Now," thought the drunken fellow, as he drew near at a mad gallop, "now for a joke." When opposite the vicar, he suddenly pulled up, rearing the horse on its haunches as he did so. Staring rudely at the vicar, who also had stopped in his walk and was looking at the man, the drunken drover said, "SIR, WHICH WAY TO HELL?" The vicar measured his man in a moment. He read the situation at a glance. He was equal to the occasion. Without a ruffle of countenance he quietly raised his hat and pointing in the direction the man was going, said, "STRAIGHT ON, MY FRIEND, STRAIGHT ON." The shot struck home. The man gave the vicar a respectful salute, and in a subdued tone, answered, "Thank you, sir, if the way to hell is straight on, I will go the other way." And turning the horse round he went up the road at a quiet pace.



LONG CLAWSON PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL.

From Melton my work penetrated to the villages beyond, lying within a radius of some ten or twelve miles. Gracious, indeed, were the visitations of God in every place. All the churches greatly benefited by our labours. It was true there, as it has been characteristically true of Primitive Methodism from the beginning, that we brought down the game and others bagged, it. Even the Established Church was moved to more earnest efforts for the people's good. In one instance, I had the pleasure of conducting a special mission for one of the English Churches in the district, my fellow-worker being the Rev. Thompson Phillips, M.A., one of the Rural Deans of Carlisle. The Church was Pickwell, and the vicar was the Rev. E. Harman, M.A., one of the most Christlike men I ever met. There comes back to me with vivid distinctness the different means which God used in the various places to move the people to thoughts of a better life. I think one of the most difficult places I entered was Somerby. Not the Somerby of Tennyson, but the Somerby of Colonel Burnaby, of Khiva fame, and Dr. Richardson, the eminent physician. Somerby over twenty years ago was in a sad condition spiritually. The curses of drink and gambling blighted many a life. Tales were told me by the fireside, by those who knew, of dark scenes in dying hours, when the soul that had mocked its God was nearing the verge. The people had been blessed with some rare spirits. Each street had rung with the clear message of salvation, but to many it was a weariness. The old proverb was certainly true here: "A prophet is not without honour save among his own people and in his own house." Pure, sweet, beautiful lives shed hallowed radiance on the village street, glorifying the trivial round and the common task. But to some it was all in vain. Hell is the only thing that will rouse some men to a sense of their moral responsibility. It was here I met with good Mr. Freeman, who sheltered William Clowes, and many of our early preachers in the time of need and persecution. The night preceding the morning on which Mr. Freeman first met Clowes, he had rested in a cart-shed. Being so cold he could not sleep, and at four o'clock a.m. had started on his day's mission without a taste of food. Mr. Freeman took him from the street after preaching to the labourers who were going to work, and gave him his breakfast, for which he received the blessing of the evangelist. The good man remembered the prayer and blessing of William Clowes to the last. Here, also, was born that hero of the cross, William Corbridge, one of the early apostles of the Salvation Army, who was one of the gifts of Primitive Methodism to that great organisation. For genius, tact, and daring, Corbridge was not one whit behind William Booth himself. Converted at Somerby, he commenced his labours in the village street and among his own people. To Mr. Corbridge's parents and sister I myself was deeply indebted for many blessings in the days when friends were few and times were hard. There are others whose names I cannot mention, but whose service of love is not forgotten. Our little chapel at Somerby was most awkwardly situated. The entrance to it was obstructed by a public-house. To make matters worse, the landlord was no friend to religion, and his customers when primed with beer were very annoying. Drink, drink, seemed to be everywhere. A source of demoralisation also to the common people were the practices of many of the so-called aristocracy of the surrounding district. The words of the preacher on the Sabbath would oft be mingled with the unholy laughter of these leaders of society over a game of bowls. I thought of these scenes when speaking with Mrs. Ormiston Chant a short time ago at Sheffield. I heard her say that fashionable society was one of the most rotten things under the sun. Those who think these words too strong should read George Sims' chapter in "Living London" on "Fashionable Society." For sheer frivolity of life I have read nothing equal to it.

I resolved if possible to do something to break in upon this fort of sin. But how to do it? I knew no better was than to attack the devil in the open air, and from door to door. The most awful sin to me is indifference. I would sooner have persecution than indifference. Showers of stones are a more hopeful sign of a revival than silent contempt. Christ's second visit to Nazareth was far less hopeful than the first. On His first visit they tried to kill Him. Proof, certainly, that His words had compelled them to think. But at the second visit they did not think Him worth a curse or a kick. I remember well the first night I went into the open air. It was bitterly cold. The streets were dark and deserted. One solitary soul stood by my side. For that act of courage his name and portrait find a place in these records. Robert Dale, lame though he was, and weary oft through hard work in the fields, knowing I was going to face the crowds in the name of Jesus, brought his famous old violin, and prepared to help me all he could. We two, assisted by the Omnipotent God, were more than equal to hell and the multitude. The keynote on the instrument was given, and starting from the farthest end of the place, we marched, not in very correct step, to the strains of an old salvation hymn up the main street. All went well until we came to the centre of the village. Here, facing the main road was the chief public-house. A large company of navvies, who were working on a branch railway, were having a day's spree. The big tap-room was filled. The door of the in facing the road was open. The landlord was in the act of having a tankard of beer filled at the board. Turning round to convey it to the men, he saw myself and Brother Dale; I singing, my brother fiddling. He stopped and burst into laughter. Calling the men's attention to the strange sight, and, no doubt, thinking the affair was a good joke, he called for another tankard of beer, and while the navvies emptied themselves on to the street to watch the fun, he came across to us, and holding the beer before me invited me to sup. He was short in stature, and I was tall. I was more than his equal in physical strength; It at once struck me that six feet consecrated with Jesus to support was more than a match for hell and four feet six any day. So I felt no fear. Calling upon my Brother Dale to "Fiddle up," which he did with a vengeance, smiling all the time, I marched on, backing the publican up the street, singing all the while and throwing my long arms about, bringing them once or twice into dangerous proximity to the man's head, The scene was comical. The navvies laughed, until at last the publican retired discomfited. The ise was broken. People were full of talk at my strange procedure. The devil was up in arms. Fellows of the baser sort whispered of upsetting me. The keeper of the public-house near the chapel made it almost impossible for decent people to come to the services. Some who attended came to the meetings to mock. I resolved to leave the chapel and outwit the publican near it by preaching lower down in the main street. I asked a butcher whose shop was in a commanding position, if he would allow me to preach on his door-step. He gave permission, and for five nights I proclaimed the Gospel there. The first night I preached from the text, " We preach Christ crucified." That service and the power God gave is talked of still. I cannot remember a word of the sermon, but the influence lives. A



ROBERT DALE, PRIMITIVE METHODIST AND VIOLINIST.

few of the baser sort were some distance away hatching mischief, when in the midst of my discourse a fine-looking man came down the street. He was arrested by the Word, and leaned against a wall to listen. At the close, when I had retired, he came up to one of the members, and said, "Is that man preaching here again?" "Yes," he was answered, "he preaches on this spot every night this week." "Then I shall come and hear him, and it will be God help the man who lays a finger on him." He came, and I was left unmolested. I laughed heartily over an incident which happened during the first service. I saw in the distance a man pacing to and fro as I was preaching, in an agitated manner. At last he stopped, and speaking to a labouring man who stood near, said, "Jack, I'll give thee half a sovereign if you'll go and throw yon fellow in the horse-pond.

The man looked at the tempter and said. "Please, mester, I'd rather you'd do that yoursen."

In Somerby, as in the other places visited, the power of God was manifest. Our own people who live in that district and whose eyes are following these pages, will call to mind many striking cases of conversion which I cannot record here, They will remember some who beautifully adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, over whose forms the snowdrop, sweet resurrection flower, now blooms, and whose spirits are crowned in the presence of the King.



THE HOUSE OF MY TEMPTATION AND VICTORY.

At Scalford a most remarkable manifestation of God's power was given. The churches were feeble, and the majority of the people were careless about spiritual things. Here I was privileged to stay under the roof of good Mr. and Mrs. Lock. Mrs. Lock was a mighty preacher in her day, and many were the seals to her ministry. Her dear husband still lives, and is comforted in the thought of a long life spent in the service of his Lord, and the sweet reflection that the eventide of life is enriched with

a Saviour's grace. And that when the shadows deepen, they will merge into the morning and reunion of heaven. The loving ministries received under their roof are part of my life's treasures. It was one night while praying in their home God gave me the assurance of a mighty work. Here, women were my chief helpers. Supreme among them being Miss Lock and her faithful companion. Night after night these faithful souls, with a few others, walked by my side through street after street, singing the Gospel, and praying while I exhorted the people. The commencement of the revival here was very peculiar. The vicar of the place, shocked at the intrusion into his quiet parish of such a noisy, enthusiastic preacher, whom, so far as he understood, nobody knew, resolved that the "nuisance" should be removed. On the Saturday night of the mission I was singing in the centre of the village. A large number of navvies and iron-workers had gathered round. Forming our little band into a procession, we marched to the front of the chapel. I was just in the middle of a verse, when a tall rather dissipated-looking man stepped into the ring and whispered to me "I would speak with you a moment." The thought at once struck me, "Glory be to God, this man wants salvation."

Stepping outside the ring, I laid my hand on his shoulder, and was about to say, "Kneel down here, and I will pray for you!" when he at once turned to a big man close by, saying, "Now, constable, take him!" For a time I was speechless. Stepping into the ring, the vicar, for it was he, commenced to harangue the crowd. I will not defile my pen by writing what he said. Among other things he urged all who stood round to retire peaceably to their homes; that such *riotous* and unseemly behaviour could not be allowed; that there were churches for people to attend if they wished to worship God; that to go bawling and shouting about the streets was contrary to law, and that if it did not cease he should be compelled to put the law in force. "As for this Vagabond fellow," pointing to me, "we know not who he is, and if you were advised by me you would take and thrust him out of the place." The whole trend of his remarks was to get the rough men who stood round to do me bodily injury. But his words were received in silence. They knew the man too well. Appealing again to the policeman to take me, the constable drew near and threatened if I did not mind he would hail me to prison. But no doubt that the thought that he perhaps was going too far made him pause. Addressing myself to the crowd, I called the attention of the vicar to the fact that the greater part of his flock were living in open sin; and that if I had broken the laws by what I had done, so much the worse for the law. That each night I was in the place I should sing and preach through every street in it. So he was free to order my arrest as soon as he pleased. Seeing the attitude of the people around, both the vicar and the constable retired. Though I must confess I should have rejoiced to have been hailed to prison. Nothing can excel being in jail for Christ's sake, except it be the stake. I had read Paul's letters, and I knew there were revelations of the glorious Christ which the soul could never know except through the dim light of a prison-cell. I had been stoned, pelted with rotten eggs, hustled, mobbed, pulled on the street, but I had never been in jail. However, the wise God withheld such high honour from me. With thankfulness I place it on high record that the vicar's incitements to violence met with no response from the rough men who stood and listened. Not one moved a foot or finger to molest me. This incident was used of God to move the town, and from it commenced a blessed work of grace. On the Sabbath morning representatives of all churches were present in our chapel to express their abhorrence at the deed, and their sympathy with me in my work. That night souls were saved, and night after night the glory of God was seen. Many years after I was preaching in a midland town. The church was crowded. It was necessary for me to return home the same night. I told the society steward my desire. At the close he asked if any one would drive me, as the last

train had gone. A gentleman rose and said he would take me with pleasure. Soon after I was being whirled along the high road through the dark night in a storm of sleet towards my home.

Ascending a hill, the gentleman said, "Do you remember the person coming to arrest you at Scalford, Mr. Flanagan?"

"I do," I answered; "why, what do you know of it?"

"I was there and heard him incite the men to do you harm. I was among the crowd. I knew nothing of religion then; but his conduct led me to come and hear you preach. The Word of God convicted me, and some time after I was saved. I am now married and my family are growing up in the fear of God."

For two years in the beautiful Vale of Belvoir I laboured for Jesus. Churches were quickened, and hundreds of souls were saved. Scenes of thrilling interest passed under my notice; scenes which I have said before, if life is spared, and opportunity is given, shall be placed on record.

From Melton I stepped into a wider ministry. For six years afterwards I preached to the multitudes the Word of Life, seeing the gathering in of glorious harvests. Then came four blessed years of ministry at the Albert Hall, Nottingham. There much fruit was gathered which today abides. Then in 1890 came the call of the Conference to London, where as aforetime, the Lord has led me, pardoned my many mistakes, and, I hope, accepted and blessed my service.

And now, dear reader, having accompanied me through the year as I have written some experiences from my life's story, I trust you have profited, as you have seen the grace of God in me. This autobiography is but a fragment, flung off in the midst of a very busy life. We must now part, you to other fields of literature, I to the pressing duties of the hour. Let us, before we part, shake hands across the space which divides us, and vow once more beneath the cross of Christ that He shall have all our nature can give. That every pulse and every breath, every wish, ambition, and desire shall go out to Him. I desire both for you and myself that we shall so weight ourselves with life's golden grain that the King Himself shall meet us at the foot of the last hill, and bear us filled with life's fruitage up through the gate of the City of God in His everlasting arms.

FAREWELL

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