

ship. But the evidence which we have exhibited might well support some definite connexion with Egypt.¹

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STUDIES IN CONVERSION.

V. THOMAS HALYBURTON.

THE conversion of this worthy shines like a star because of the darkness of the period to which he belongs. His date is easily remembered; for he was ordained to the ministry in the parish of Ceres, Fifeshire, in 1700. Ten years later, in 1710, he was transferred to the chair of divinity in the University of St. Andrews;² but, shortly afterwards, in 1712, he died in his thirty-eighth year—an age often fatal to genius. He had a most triumphant deathbed; and the account of these last days, lighted up with a seraphic glow, has made his *Memoir* a favourite book among his countrymen. But the portion contributed by his own hand is also of unusual interest; and it is almost entirely occupied with his conversion.

Halyburton's autobiography cannot, however, be said

¹ On the strength of the type of ecclesiastical organisation indicated by the Epistle, Dr. Moffatt compares the community with which it was connected to some village churches in Egypt, referred to by Dionysius of Alexandria (*Introduction to N.T.*, p. 464, note).

² In the Inaugural Oration, in Latin, with which he took possession of his professorship, there is unfeigned acknowledgment of the scantiness of his scholastic acquirements; but, after his premature death, his friends were able to publish convincing evidences of his ability and erudition in a work entitled *Natural Religion Insufficient and Revealed Necessary to Man's Happiness*, in reply to the writings of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and a shorter treatise entitled *The Nature of Faith, or the Ground on which Faith assents to the Scriptures*, in which the attitude recently taken up by Evangelical scholars to the Scriptures is, in important respects, anticipated, and the argument from Christian experience is elevated to its rightful place. These posthumous works were recommended to the public by the foremost names of the time, that of William Carstares heading the list.

to have the greatness of either Augustine's or Bunyan's. It is imitative. For example, Augustine, in *The Confessions*, acknowledges the sins of his infancy, which he cannot remember; because, when he observes in infants such passions as jealousy and anger, he infers that he, as an infant, must have exhibited the same faults. This not very happy idea is adopted by Halyburton and expanded, till, in his hands, it becomes a caricature, such an account of his earliest years being given as is a libel on childhood. Then again, he is too anxious to bring the account of his experience into line with orthodox doctrine. For instance, when describing his own repentance, he makes it too exact a copy of repentance as it is described in theological text-books. In general, he is too didactic; and, in following the orthodox course of his experience, you almost long for some of the wild extravagances of *Grace Abounding*. He carries to a greater pitch than any other writer whom I remember the practice of proving every statement he makes by a quotation from Scripture; in fact, on most of his pages there is more Scripture than original narrative. The effect is sometimes ludicrous; but, on the whole, after one gets accustomed to it, the quaint practice produces rather a pleasing impression, the quotations being often exceedingly striking and ingenious.

What Halyburton's book lacks is the touch of nature. It moves too exclusively in the region of the spiritual; it might have been made more interesting had the author told us more of the world in which he lived and the men and women with whom he came in contact. He does not, indeed, carry this unworldliness so far as another of the Scottish spiritual autobiographers, Fraser of Brea, who scarcely lets it be seen that he lived on the common earth at all. And probably it was modesty that made our author

reticent. The first sentence of his book is in these words : "The common occurrences of the life of one in all respects so inconsiderable are not worth recording." Herein, however, he made a great mistake : he did not realise how interesting are the actual experiences of any human being to all his fellow-creatures.

If any of my readers are fond of Halyburton, they will hardly be pleased with these exceptions taken to his merits. But I now add that, making all deductions, we owe to him what has been called by a competent judge the third-best of spiritual autobiographies ; and it is no small achievement to have secured the third place after St. Augustine and John Bunyan. Some readers may even derive more instruction from Halyburton than from either of the others ; because in St. Augustine there are many things hard to be understood, and in Bunyan there is much that is singular and morbid, whereas Halyburton keeps in the middle of the king's highway. To any who may never have seen the book it may be safely promised that the mastery of it—though it is but a little one—will do them more good than a twelvemonth's reading in religious periodicals.

Halyburton belonged to the seed of the godly, his father, who died when he was but eight years old, having been minister of the parish of Aberdalgy, near Perth, but ejected by Charles II. in 1662, along with other three hundred ministers, the flower of the Scottish clergy. His mother, who was of gentle blood and of a rare saintliness, was so pressed with persecution, after her husband's death, that she had to flee with her family to Holland, where the subject of this chapter received part of his education. It was on the voyage thither that he first felt the stirrings of personal religion. Whether from the dangerous nature of the passage or from the fancies of a child in a novel situation, he was in terror of death and cried to God, with vows of

what he would do if his life was spared. But, as his mother predicted, his impressions passed away when he found himself on *terra firma*.

Halyburton is one of those, of whom there may be more than some optimistic thinkers suppose, who, although most carefully trained in religion from the very first, yet, when they come to consciousness of themselves, feel their hearts hardened against God, and not attracted to the spiritual world, but the reverse. Herein I should be inclined to place the special significance of his conversion. "The bent of my soul, from a child," he says, "was set against the Lord." And, in reference to a much later time, he says, "If others think there are good inclinations in their own natural hearts, I must quit my part in them. Woeful experience teaches me, and obliges me to acknowledge, to my own shame, that I never looked toward the Lord's way save when He drew me. I never went longer in it than the force lasted. I inclined to sit down, and sat down indeed at every step. I never got up again but when the Lord's power was anew put forth. I never went one step but with a grudge. Sin bit me, and yet I loved it; my heart deceived me, and yet I trusted in it rather than in God. I never parted with my sin till God beat and drove me from it."

His second access of religious anxiety was, like his first, due to the terror of death. Under the edict of toleration issued by James II. the family returned from Holland and settled at Perth. But it was well known that the King had granted this indulgence for the sake not of Puritans and Presbyterians but of Roman Catholics, whom he wished to protect; and, a short time before the Revolution, a panic went through Scotland, and a rumour spread, that it was the intention of the King to establish Romanism among his subjects, and that the signal for the inception

of the new policy would be a general massacre of the adherents of Protestant truth. As the son of a family closely identified with earnest religion, the boy felt that this threatened him. His was a cruel case; for he had not enough religion to be prepared to die for it, and yet could he declare himself a Papist? "I was in a dreadful strait," he says, "betwixt two. On the one hand, my convictions of sin were sharp, fears of a present death and judgment quickening them. This made me attend more to the Word; the more I attended to it, they increased the more; and I was daily persuaded more and more that there was no way to be rid of them but by turning religious. On the other hand, if I should engage in earnest with religion, then I saw the hazard of suffering for it, and wist not but I might be called immediately to die for it; and this I could not think of doing. Betwixt the two I was dreadfully tossed. Some nights, sleep went from mine eyes. I set imagination to work, and did sometimes strongly impress myself with the fancy of an Irish cut-throat holding a dagger to my breast and offering me these terms, 'Quit your religion, turn Papist, and you shall live; hold it, and you are dead.' The imagination was sometimes so strong that I have fainted almost with it, and still I was dreadfully unresolved what to do. Sometimes I would let him give me the fatal stroke; but hereon my spirits sank, and my heart quailed at the apprehension of death. At other times I resolved to quit my religion, but with resolution to take it up again, after the danger was over. But here I could get no rest; for, 'What,' said I, 'if the treacherous enemy destroy me, and so I lose both life and religion? or what if I die before the danger is over, and time be not allowed me to repent?' I continued this way at times even till after the battle of Killiecrankie, which was fought July 27, 1689."

To complete his education, his mother took him to Edinburgh in his sixteenth year; and, in his twentieth year, he went as a student to the university of St. Andrews, where he passed through the usual course in arts. At school and college the Spirit of God continued to strive with him. Especially at St. Andrews he lived under an earnest ministry; and occasional touches of illness deepened his earnestness and kept him out of the paths of folly. He was not only exemplary in the outward profession of religion, but practised secret prayer, and sometimes went so far as to draw up and sign a covenant with God. He used to wonder whether or not he was truly a Christian, and sometimes he thought he could discern in himself a few of the simpler marks of one. But he was not satisfied; for he thought that there must be a peace and a power attainable which he did not yet possess, and that genuine Christianity must be a grander and diviner thing than he had yet experienced. He feared the Lord, but he did not love Him; he kept the commandments, but he found them grievous; his religion, in short, was force, not nature; and, as he said, on looking back on this stage of his progress afterwards, he had "engaged to live a new life with an old heart."

After leaving college he became tutor or private chaplain in the noble family of Wemyss in Fife. And here he passed through an exceedingly painful experience, being long entangled in the difficulties and perplexities of scepticism.

To this he seems to have had a natural inclination; for, long before this, at a very early age, he was troubled with doubts of a radical type. At the university he was an enthusiastic student of philosophy; and this led him to question received opinions, especially at the beginning: he says that, in his first year of philosophy, he thought he knew more than ever he thought he knew afterwards.

But a strong tendency to scepticism was at that period in the air. Within the Church, that strange chilling of the spiritual atmosphere had begun which, in the subsequent decades of the eighteenth century, produced what is now remembered under the sinister name of Moderatism; and, outside the Church, the movement of thought had already commenced which was represented, somewhat later, in Scotland by David Hume and in France by Voltaire. It would appear that in the noble house of Wemyss, before the young chaplain arrived, this sceptical philosophy had obtained a firm footing; and, day by day, he was plied with the suggestions of those who had thrown off what they considered the yoke of orthodoxy; though he affirms that far more searching doubts were suggested by his own mind than any he heard from others.

His doubts related chiefly to the existence of God and the credibility of the Scriptures; and, as has been hinted, they went very deep. He could not be satisfied with the mild Deism in which his fellow-inquirers reposed. With him it was everything or nothing. And for long it seemed as if the latter must be the alternative and he must acknowledge himself an atheist. Still he was held back by certain considerations. One of these was the utter misery and hopelessness of atheism: in giving up his faith he was giving up his all and getting nothing in return. Another was the memory of the lives of the godly people among whom he had been brought up: their faith had supported them in the paths of well-doing, and he could not believe that what had shaped such characters was a lie. He recalled "the shining evidence of the power of religion in the lives and especially in the deaths of the martyrs." On the contrary, he marked the immoral lives of the majority of unbelievers; and even those of them who had not on this account a selfish interest in the arguments against

religion seemed to him to be far more eager in searching for what might strengthen their doubts than for what might satisfy them. In spite of all the objections which were brought against the Word of God, yet the book proved itself to be divine by this, that it condemned his sins and seemed to be acquainted with his inmost thoughts. He sank into a condition of the greatest misery, entirely giving up all thoughts of the ministry of the Gospel, with a view to which he had been educated. He had no person to whom to confide his difficulties. He read extensively in books which might be supposed suitable to his case; but, whatever light any book might give, it seemed to be extinguished as soon as the book left his hand; and the darkness rolled back again. "I was sometimes," he says, "at cursing the day of my birth, wishing I had never been born. I wished often that I had been in other circumstances, and that I had been bred to the plough or some such employment. I was weary of my life, and yet I was afraid to die."

This continued for a long time. Yet he did not cease to pray; or, if at any time he did so, the sins into which he immediately fell roused his conscience and scourged him back to the exercise with shame and terrors. "Then," he says, "the wrath of God dropped into my soul, and the poison of His arrows drunk up my spirits." Never, however, all the time—and this circumstance is a remarkable one—was he without a sense that the end was not yet. At the back of his mind there lingered a desperate hope that a light was yet to break on him—that he might obtain a kind of evidence different from that supplied by reading and argumentation—indeed, that he might see Christianity from within instead of from without.

Suddenly and mysteriously this hope was realised. One day, while he was engaged in secret prayer but in

the deepest dejection, the Lord graciously revealed Himself, and turned his sorrow into joy. "I cannot be very positive," he says, "about the day or hour of this deliverance, nor can I satisfy many other questions about the way and manner of it. But this is of no consequence, if the work is in substance sound: 'for the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' Many things about the way and manner we may be ignorant of, while we are sufficiently assured of the effects; and as to these I must say with the blind man, 'One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see'."

Up till this time his religion had been a struggle to secure God's favour; but now God showed him that He had loved him with an everlasting love. He had been multiplying his own works to secure the divine acquittal; but now he saw that Christ had undertaken the work of salvation and finished it; and that all he had to do was to cast his anchor there. In short, he had lived in terror of an exacting and angry God, and now God took him in His arms and called him His child. It was not through any particular text of Scripture that the light broke on him; but immediately the light which he had obtained shone back on all the texts, which began to sparkle with new meanings; and in a few days he learned more than he had done in all his preceding life. For days he moved in an ecstasy of joy, surprised at the alteration in his feelings. Formerly all that he desired in religion was the assurance of his own salvation; but now this sank into a subordinate place, and what he rejoiced in was that God was glorified in his salvation. For this reason, too, he desired the salvation of others. "I found," he says, "my care of all God's concerns enlarged, and began to be desirous to have

the Lord exalted in the earth. I began, too, to be concerned for affronts offered to the Lord's glory by others : I saw transgressors and was grieved, because they kept not God's law, and was oft made to weep and pray for them in secret." He had the satisfaction of learning that the new spirit with which he began to discharge the duties of his chaplaincy was blessed to at least one member of the noble house which he served. Formerly, though he kept God's laws, they were a burden to him ; but now every one of them seemed excellent ; and his highest object of desire was to be entirely free from sin. Formerly he had been sorry for sin, because it exposed him to punishment ; now it grieved him because it grieved his Saviour. Formerly he had attended to prayer and other ordinances of religion as duties ; now he sought in them communion with One he loved. And he found in his heart " a new and formerly unknown love to all that seemed to have anything of the Lord's image," however much they might differ from him in habits or opinions. Last of all, his besetting sins received a stunning stroke, and temptations vanished like ghosts before the rising of the sun.

This ecstasy did not last ; but it sank only as the rapture of first love shades into the loyalty and chastened happiness of wedded life. Temptations returned ; doubts again needed to be solved ; there was many a fall ; yet the influence of the change affected every hour of his subsequent history ; and the God who had revealed Himself at this crisis never ceased to be for him the grandest of all realities.

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