

Autobiography

GIPSY SMITH

1902

1 HIS LIFE AND WORK

1.1 NOTE TO MY READERS

This story of my life is sent forth to the world with a diffidence amounting almost to reluctance on my part, but I have often been urged to tell the tale of my not unromantic career in full, and these persistent requests are my justification for the present volume.

I gladly acknowledge the invaluable literary help which I have received from my friend Mr. W. Grinton Berry, M.A., in its preparation.

I do not pose as a practical or skilled author, and Mr. Berry's help has been simply indispensable.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

There is little need for any introduction to this book; but my friend Gipsy Smith having done me the honor of asking me to prefix a few words to it, I gladly comply with his request. I have at least one qualification for my present position—namely, my long and close knowledge of the man who here tells his life-story, and I can say with absolute confidence and sincerity that that knowledge has discovered to me a character of rare sweetness, goodness, simplicity, and godliness, and possessed of something of that strange attractiveness with which popular beliefs have endowed his race. But the fascination is explicable on better grounds than magic spells; it is the charm of a nature which draws others to itself, because it goes out to meet them, and is loved because it loves.

The life told in this book has its picturesque and its pathetic sides, but is worthy of study for deeper reasons than these. It witnesses to the transforming power of Jesus Christ, entering a soul through that soul's faith. A gipsy encampment is the last place whence an evangelist might be expected to emerge. Almost alien to our civilization, with little education, with vices and limitations inherited from generations who were despised and suspected, and with the virtues of a foreign clan encamped on hostile ground, the gipsies have been all but over-looked by the churches, with one or two exceptions, such as the work of Crabbe half a century since among those of Hampshire and the New Forest.

But the story in this book brings one more striking and welcome evidence that there are no hopeless classes in the view of the gospel. We are accustomed to say that often enough, but we do not always act as if we believed it, and it may do some of us good to have another living example of Christ's power to elevate and enrich a life, whatever its antecedents, disadvantages, and limitations. Gipsy or gentleman, "we have all of us one human heart," and the deepest need in that heart is an anodyne for the sense of sin, and a power which will implant in it righteousness. Here is a case in which Christ's gospel has met both wants. Is there anything else that would or could do that?

For another reason this book deserves study, for it raises serious questions as to the Church's office of "evangelizing every creature." Gipsy Smith has remarkable qualifications for that work, and has done it all over the country with a sobriety, transparent sincerity, and loyalty to the ordinary ministrations of the churches which deserve and have received general recognition. But what he has not is as instructive as what he has. He is not an orator, nor a scholar, nor a theologian. He is not a genius.

But, notwithstanding these deficiencies in his equipment, he can reach men's hearts, and turn them from darkness to light in a degree which many of us ministers cannot do. It will be a good day for all the churches when their members ask themselves whether they are doing the work for which they are established by their Lord, if they fail in winning men to be His, and whether Christ will be satisfied if, when He asks them why they have not carried out His commands to take His gospel to those around them who are without it, they answer, "Lord, we were so busy studying deep theological questions, arguing about the validity of critical inquiries as to the dates of the books of the Bible, preaching and hearing eloquent discourses, comforting and edifying one another, that we had to leave the Christless masses alone." This book tells the experience of one man who has been an evangelist and nothing more. May it help to rouse the conscience of the church to feel that it is to be the messenger of the glad tidings first of all, whatever else it may be in addition! May it set many others to bethink themselves whether they, too, are not sufficiently furnished "for the work of an evangelist" to some hearts at least, though they have neither learning nor eloquence, since they have the knowledge of One who has saved them, and desires through them to save others.

ALEXANDER MCLAREN

1.3 INTRODUCTION - AMERICAN EDITION

My first acquaintance with Gipsy Smith was made in 1886 when I entered upon work in Hull, which he had originated. Going at the invitation of the committee then in oversight of the work at Wilberforce Hall to conduct services for fourteen days, I remained thirteen months, and thus had opportunity to observe the results of his labors. I found very many whole-hearted followers of Jesus Christ in dead earnest about the conversion of others. These, most of

them, had been brought to God under the preaching of this man. Many of them remain in the churches of the town unto this day, and retain their first love to Christ and devotion for His cause. During this time I often met Gipsy, and from the first my heart was joined to his as a brother beloved, and I count him still as my close personal friend and a highly valued fellowlaborer in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

During these years I have noted with great joy his remarkable development, until to-day he stands at the very front of those who are doing the work of the Evangelist. His early life, as this book clearly shows, consisted of certain facts which were against the chances of his success, and yet, taking a higher viewpoint of consideration, they were in his favor.

His lack of educational advantages would have seemed likely to bar his progress. He recognized this, and set himself from the first with a devotion and earnestness which were magnificent to remedy the defect. He has been a hard worker and hard reader, and this has found its reward in the fact that to-day he has acquired a style and delivery that is full of force and beauty. One of our great London dailies said of him recently that he is one of the finest exponents of the possibilities of Anglo-Saxon speech since the days of John Bright.

It is possible to hear him again and again, as I have done, without detecting a flaw in his grammar or pronunciation; and one is filled with wonder at his wonderful triumph in this direction.

In his case the very early lack has been the stimulus of constant effort, and there has been no arrest of development consequent upon the mistaken notion—alas, too common among more favored men—that he had his education long ago.

Greatly in his favor is the fact that he was a child of nature, nurtured near to her heart. When that Spirit who breatheth where He listeth brought him into living contact with Christ, the gain of this early environment was manifest.

To know him to-day is to catch the sweet, healthy freshness of woods and flowers and dear old mother earth, and to breathe the fragrance of the life lived far from the stifling atmosphere of great cities. I never talk with him without taking in a wholesome quantity of ozone. His most remarkable growth has been spiritual. In tone and temper, and those fine qualities of spirit which are the fairest productions of Christian life, he has steadily advanced, and to-day more than ever is a child of God in outward conduct and inward character.

Though thus a child of the country, his mission has been pre-eminently that of a messenger of the Gospel to great cities. It is one of the most heartstirring and spirit-reviving sights I know to watch a dense mass of city folk, toilers in the factories, clerks from the offices, professional men, and those of culture and leisure, listen to him as he pleads with tender eloquence the cause of the Master.

Gipsy Smith is an evangelist by right of a "gift," bestowed by the Spirit of God, as certainly as there ever was such in the history of the Church. In his case, moreover, we have a conspicuous example of the fact that the Spirit bestows such gifts on those by natural endowment fitted to receive and use them. There is no conflict between a man as God made him and the work of grace in him when he is utterly abandoned to the will of God.

This story of his life is full of deep interest, as it breathes the very spirit of the man—artless, intense, transparent. For it I bespeak a reading on the part of all those who love the Lord Jesus and are interested in the story of His methods with the messengers of His grace. I welcome the book as a fresh living message of that grace, and as adding another to the long list of lives that show forth the excellencies of Him who calls men out of darkness into His marvellous light.

This brief prefatory work is a work of love, for out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, and of my friend who is at once Gipsy and Gentleman, because wholly Christian, I can truly say, thank my God upon every remembrance of him.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN

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