

Autobiography

GIPSY SMITH

1902

1 HIS LIFE AND WORK

1.1 Chapter 28

SOME FRESH STORIES

ABOUT PETER MACKENZIE

I REACHED England again on the 18th of May, 1896. From that date until September, 1897, when I began my work as the first missionary of the National Free Church Council, I was occupied in conducting brief campaigns in different parts of England. Let me note some interesting points in connection with this period.

At Consett the miners were so moved that they started to hold prayer meetings down a coal-pit—in the month of June, too, when it was very hot. I worked at Norwood Grove Congregational Church, Liverpool, with the Rev. E. R. Barrett, BA, the pastor. We had a most fruitful week. Two years after this date Mr. Barrett told me that he had never had a communion service since the mission at which some persons who dated their awakening from my visit were not admitted to church membership.

One of the most notable missions of my life was conducted at Wolverhampton in October, 1896. Dr. Berry was the life and soul of the enterprise. He gave up all other engagements in order to be present at the meetings. The annual Mayor's dinner fell due during this campaign, and Dr. Berry was invited to attend. His reply was that the most important thing in creation to him at that moment was the mission. What would his people think of him if he were feasting at the Mayor's banquet while sinners were being converted? All the other ministers of Wolverhampton loyally supported Dr. Berry. The mission had been arranged by the local Free Church Council, and I am sure that it did a great deal towards bringing Dr. Berry to the point of supporting the engagement of a Free Church missionary. No man ever stood by me more sympathetically than Dr. Berry, whether in the meetings or out of the meetings, in his study or in my lodgings. I have for years had a great longing for a peaceful period of calm study, and I chanced to say to Dr. Berry, "I wish I could sit down and do

nothing but study for a year." He retorted, "Yes, and then you would be spoiled. Just you go on with your work and do as much reading as you can." We had eight hundred inquirers. One hundred and forty of the converts elected to join Dr. Berry's church. Dr. Berry summoned a church meeting, and, choosing one hundred and forty of his best members, put a young convert into the charge of each. The member was expected to visit the new convert, and report to Dr. Berry every week or two for two, three, or four months. I heartily commend this plan. It is good for the young convert and good for the church member.

In accordance with my custom, I told the story of my life on the closing night. All the tickets were sold long before the meeting. The crowd who had been unable to get tickets gathered outside the building in the hope of squeezing their way somehow into the hall. They knew there was a little standing room. The policemen were utterly unable to keep the people in order. They sought to charge the crowd, but the crowd charged them. They pinned them against the walls and knocked their helmets about in all directions.

My mission at Dewsbury was conducted under the shadow of the great name of Peter Mackenzie. I enjoyed the intimate friendship of Peter, who was a sunbeam in the lives of thousands. I met him for the first time, sixteen or seventeen years ago, on the platform of Hull station. Both of us had been preaching in the town. We were leaving in the same train, though not in the same compartment, because our destinations were different. I told him that a great work of grace had been accomplished in Hull. "Glory to God!" he shouted, "I will send you a goose at Christmas." Three months passed away. I had forgotten all about the goose and Peter's promise, but he had not forgotten. He sent me the following letter:

"HONORED AND DEAR SIR,—I have had no time to purchase a goose. But I send you 10s. and a photo of yours truly, which when you receive you will have goose enough. PETER MACKENZIE."

I met him again at Crewe some time after I had addressed the Congregational Union at Hanley. Said he to me, "What a lot of steam we should waste if we stopped the engine every time a donkey brayed and went to inquire into his bronchial tubes." He bought a rose at the station and put it into my coat. Then he hailed a newspaper boy, and shouted to him, "Penn'orth O' Tory, Penn'orth O' Liberal, a Penn'orth O' fun." Then, handing the papers to me, he said, "Here is your train; read how my Father is ruling the world."

Peter came to Hanley, while I was there, to preach in the Wesleyan Chapel, and to lecture in the Imperial Circus on "The Devil: his Personality, Character, and Power." The lecture was announced over the town in black letters on a huge green poster. As I was passing along the street a half-tipsy man accosted me, and pointing to the placard said, "What nonsense! There's no such person as the devil." I asked him what he had been doing of late. "Oh," he said, "I have been drinking. I have had a six weeks' spree. I've had a fearful time—the blues terribly." "Oh, indeed," I said; "what do you mean by the blues?" "Don't you know?—little uns." "Little uns?" "Yes, little uns. Don't you know what I mean?—little devils, scores of them." "Well," I said, "don't you think, now, that if there are lots of little uns, there must be an old un too?" When I seconded

the vote of thanks to Peter for his lecture, I told this story. Rising from his seat and waving his chair over his head, he shouted, "Glory, glory. I'll tell that all over the country."

When Peter was brought home ill to Dewsbury, the Wesleyan minister of the town, Mr. Martin, called to see him. "I am very sorry, sir," he said, "to find you in bed and so ill." "Yes, yes," said Peter, "I am in the dry-dock, undergoing repairs." Mr. Martin heard that Peter had become much worse, and again called on him. "Ah," said Peter, "Father is going to send down the angel and let old Peter out of prison." A few days later he died.