

Real Life Stories
Harry Moorhouse, the English Evangelist

HENRY MOORHOUSE, or as he was more familiarly called, “HARRY MOORHOUSE, the English Evangelist,” was born in the city of Manchester. When very young he was sent to jail on more than one occasion, afterwards joining the army and trying the life of a soldier, being bought off by his father at considerable cost.

Passing the Aihambra Circus in Manchester, where Richard Weaver was preaching, hearing a noise within and thinking a fight was going on, Henry buttoned his coat and rushed in, ready for the fray. As he entered he was arrested by one word— “JESUS.” The glorious Name shot from the preacher’s lips went home as a bullet and as balm to the heart of the wanderer. His early childhood, reckless career, and awful danger rose vividly before his vision, the “Glorious Gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4) message went home to his heart, and he who had entered to fight remained to praise and pray.

Thus suddenly and soundly converted to God, he entered heartily into the service of his new Master. His first services were chiefly in the open air, at local and national gatherings, and in special places of concourse. From morning till evening his joy was to spend his time distributing tracts, speaking personally with individuals wherever he got an opportunity, or crying aloud in the street or market-place, urging multitudes to “flee from the wrath to come.”

Like the apostle of old, he had visions of God. Upon one occasion he saw in his sleep three young men in Manchester, each strangely attired in a white jacket, on which were the words legibly written, “These men are going to Hell!” The place appeared to be near the infirmary, and before them was a deep burning lake of fire, unperceived by them. Henry called aloud for them to stop, but they took no heed, until he fell down upon his knees and cried to God, saying, “Lord, it is not by might, nor by power, but by Thy Spirit.” The men then turned back in haste, having discovered their danger. This dream was on Friday night; and on the Sunday evening following, when Henry was preaching in the Aihambra Circus, those three identical young men came into the place, and before the meeting closed they were all on their knees crying out for mercy, and were brought to accept the Lord Jesus Christ and the pardon of their sins.

The revival stream, which had begun to flow in 1854, was in full tide in 1860, when Moorhouse was converted. Thus he was early brought into touch with the enthusiastic spirits—RICHARD WEAVER, from the coalpit, whose style he largely followed; JOHN HAMBLETON, the converted actor; EDWARD USHER, a dockyard labourer; WM. CARTER, the converted sweep; HENRY VARLEY, a butcher, and afterwards valiant champion for the truth; REGINALD RADCLIFFE, the Liverpool lawyer; BROWNLOW NORTH, the man of wealth and fashion; JOSHUA POOLE, better known as “Fiddler Joss;” J. DENHAM SMITH, a devout expositor; C. H. SPURGEON, of the Metropolitan Tabernacle; H. GRATTAN GUINNESS, of the “Regions. Beyond,” and many others.

D. L. MOODY and IRAD. SANKEY afterwards became his special friends.

Henry’s special call to devote all his time to the work of the Lord came through an enthusiast known as “the hatless preacher.” One evening when Henry was engaged in crying his wares as auctioneer of “Notions,” and rapping for bids, the hatless man suddenly appeared before him, and cried aloud, “Thou oughtest to have thy Bible in thy hand out amongst the people, and not that hammer for the devil,” and immediately departed. That short, terrible speech was like a thunderbolt falling on Henry, and the words gave a harder blow than he could stand. He at once dropped the auctioneer’s hammer, went to Liverpool, sought out Hambleton, and entered with him on an evangelistic tour through the provinces. Since that date Henry laboured in the special work of evangelising without a fixed salary, or human promise of support. A trio consisting of John Hambleton, the preacher; Edward Usher, the singer; and Henry Moorhouse, the young and fervid disciple, attended the tercentenary of William Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon. They bore aloft textboards bearing the words, “Christ for Me! Praise the Lord! Mercy’s Free!” and created no small stir, with fruit which shall abound in “that Day.”

The stories concerning the visits of these heroes to race meetings, haunts of vice, sinners in the slums; their theatre services, sometimes fourteen theatres were filled in London on one Sunday night; visits to public executions, then not uncommon; labours amongst Romanists in many parts of Ireland, and “labours more abundant” are told in “Buds, Blossoms, and Fruits of the Revival.

Real Life Stories
Harry Moorhouse, the English Evangelist

Through incessant labours in Britain, Henry Moorhouse, never strong at the best, began to show signs of sadly needing rest and change. Hence he set out for the United States, arriving in Philadelphia in 1868. His welcome was so hearty, and his ministry so appreciated, that he paid five visits in the following ten years. How he became “the man who moved the man who moved the world” is best told in D. L. MOODY’S own words: “In 1867, when I was preaching in Dublin, at the close of the service a young man, who did not look over seventeen, though he was older, came up to me and said he would like to go back to America with me, and preach the Gospel. I thought he could not preach it, and I said I was undecided when I could go back. He asked me if I would write to him, as I did not know whether I wanted him or not. After I arrived at Chicago I got a letter saying he had just arrived in New York, and he would come and preach. I wrote him a cold letter, asking him to call on me if he came West. A few days after I got a letter stating he would be in Chicago next Thursday. I didn’t know what to do with him. I said to the officers of the Church, “There is a man coming from England, and he wants to preach. I am going to be absent Thursday and Friday. If you will let him preach on those days I will be back on Saturday and take him off your hands.” They did not care about his preaching, being a stranger; but at my request they let him preach. On my return on Saturday I was anxious to hear how the people liked him, and I asked my wife how that young Englishman got along. How did they like him? She said they liked him very much. “He preaches a little different from what you do. He tells the people God loves them. I think you will like him.” I said he was wrong. I thought I could not like a man who preached contrary to what I was preaching. I went down on Saturday night to hear him, but I had made up my mind not to like him, because he preached different from me.

After graphically describing the six nights on John 3:16, Moody concludes: “In closing up that seventh sermon, he said, ‘For seven nights I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but this poor stammering tongue of mine will not let me. If I could ascend Jacob’s ladder and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, to tell me how much love God the Father has for this poor lost world, all that Gabriel could say would be, that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. “ I have never forgotten those nights. I have preached a different Gospel since, and I have had more power with God and man since then.” Ever after he was a close, personal friend and helper of Messrs. Moody and Sankey. Fleming H. Revell, the American Publisher, who died in 1931, was present at these services, and confirms the story as here stated.

During the last few years of his life he found work something akin to that of his early days in preaching and selling Scriptures from a Bible carriage. In two years he sold over 150,000 Bibles and Testaments, and gave away millions of books and tracts.

In 1876 his service was evidently closing, his last year of labour was one of much suffering, the doctors said his heart was twice the size it ought to be, yet he was ever bright and happy. Near the end he said, “If it were the Lord’s will to raise me up again, I should like to preach from the text ‘God so loved the world.’” On 28th December, 1880, in his fortieth year, he passed Home to receive the “Well done,” and to enter into “the joy of his Lord.”

The two veterans, Richard Weaver and Henry Moorhouse, lie not far from each other in Ardwick Cemetery, Manchester. John 3:16 is engraved on the memorial to Moorhouse.

John Harnbleton, in relating his farewell interview with Henry, aptly summed up his life: “Calling to see him on Monday last, before he left us, I grasped his arms, as his face betokened that the enemy death was doing his last work, and said, ‘Harry, we shall soon meet up yonder.’ He replied, while gasping for breath, ‘Sure, sure, sure!’ How plainly visible is the work of God in putting into such a little frail vessel as our brother such a treasure, showing us all that the excellency of the power is of God.”

Henry’s last letter aptly summed up his own life. “Ask prayer for me to suffer for Christ better than ever I preached for Him; I ONLY WANT TO GLORIFY HIM.”