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**From Death into Life or, twenty
years of my minstry**

William Haslam

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 The Broken Nest, 1841.

CHAPTER 2 Religious Life.

CHAPTER 3 Ordination.

CHAPTER 4 Antiquarian Researches and Ministry, 1843-46.

CHAPTER 5 The New Parish, 1846.

CHAPTER 6 The Awakening, 1848-51.

CHAPTER 7 Conversion, 1851.

CHAPTER 8 The Awakening, 1848-51.

CHAPTER 9 The Visitor, 1851.

CHAPTER 10 The First Christmas, 1851-52.

CHAPTER 11 Dreams and Visions, 1851-4.

CHAPTER 12 Billy Bray, 1852.

CHAPTER 13 Cottage Meetings, 1852.

CHAPTER 14 Open-Air Services, 1852.

CHAPTER 15 Drawing-Room Meetings, 1852-53.

CHAPTER 16 Opposition, 1853.

CHAPTER 17 Individual Cases, 1853.

CHAPTER 18 A Visit to Veryan, 1853.

- CHAPTER 19 A Mission in the "Shires." 1853.
- CHAPTER 20 A Stranger from London, 1853.
- CHAPTER 21 Golant Mission, 1854.
- CHAPTER 22 The High Church Rector, 1854.
- CHAPTER 23 A Mission in Staffordshire, 1854.
- CHAPTER 24 Sanctification.
- CHAPTER 25 The Removal, 1855
- CHAPTER 26 Plymouth, 1855
- CHAPTER 27 Devonport, 1855
- CHAPTER 28 A Mission to the North, 1855
- CHAPTER 29 Tregoney, 1855
- CHAPTER 30 Secessions, 1856
- CHAPTER 31 Hayle, 1857-58
- CHAPTER 32 Bible Readings, 1858-59
- CHAPTER 33 The Work Continued, 1859
- CHAPTER 34 The Dismissal, 1860-61

INTRODUCTION

This volume is not so much a history of my own life, as of the Lord's dealings with me; setting forth how He wrought in and by me during the space of twenty years. It will be observed that this is not, as biographies generally are, an account of life on to death; but rather the other way—a narrative of transition from death into life, and that in more senses than one.

I had been given over by three physicians to die, but it pleased the Lord, in answer to prayer, to raise me up again. My restored health and strength I thankfully devoted to a religious and earnest life. In the height and seeming prosperity of this, the Lord awakened me to see that I was dead in trespasses and sins; still far from Him; resting on my own works; and going about to establish my own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God. Then He quickened me by the Holy Ghost, and raised me up into a new and spiritual life.

In this volume the reader will meet with the respective results of (what I have called) the Religious, as distinguished from the Spiritual, life. The former produced only outward and ecclesiastical effects, while the latter brought forth fruit in the salvation of souls, to the praise and glory of God.

One object in writing this book is to warn and instruct earnest-minded souls, who are, as I was once, strangers to the experience of salvation, seeking rest where I am sure they can never find it, and labouring to do good to others when they have not yet received that good themselves. They are vainly "building from the top;" trying to live before they are born; to become holy before they have become justified; and to lead others to conversion before they have been converted themselves.

A second object is—to draw the attention of every earnest, seeking, or anxious soul, to consider the Lord's marvellous goodness in first bearing with me in my religious wanderings, and then using me for His glory in the salvation of hundreds.

Another desire I have is—to cheer the hearts of believers who are working for God, by relating to them what He has done through me, and can do again, by the simple preaching of the Gospel. Here the reader will meet with narratives of the Lord's work in individual cases, in congregations, and in parishes—wonderful things which are worthy of record.

I have not shunned to tell of the mistakes I fell into after my conversion, hoping that others may take heed and profit by them; and then I shall not have written in vain.

CHAPTER 1

The Broken Nest, 1841.

At the time in which this history begins, I had, in the providence of God, a very happy nest; and as far as temporal prospects were concerned, I was provided for to my liking, and, though not rich, was content. I had taken my degree; was about to be ordained; and, what is more, was engaged to be married; in order, as I thought, to settle down as an efficient country parson.

With this bright future before me, I went on very happily; when, one evening, after a hard and tiring day, just as I was sitting down to rest, a letter was put into my hand which had been following me for several days. "Most urgent" was written on the outside. It told me of the alarming illness of the lady to whom I was engaged, and went on to say that if I wished to see her alive I must set off with all haste. It took me a very short time to pack my bag and get my travelling coats and rugs together, so that I was all ready to start by the night mail. At eight o'clock punctually I left London for the journey of two hundred and eighty miles. All that night I sat outside the coach; all the next day; and part of the following night. I shall never forget the misery of mind and body that I experienced, for I was tired before starting; and the fatigue of sitting up all night, together with the intense cold of the small hours of the morning, were almost beyond endurance. With the morning, however, came a warm and bright sunshine, which in some degree helped to cheer me; but my bodily suffering was so great that I could never have held up had it not been for the mental eagerness with which I longed to get forward. It was quite consonant with my feelings when the horses were put into full gallop, especially when they were tearing down one hill to get an impetus to mount another.

At length, the long, long journey was over; and about thirty hours after starting, I found myself staggering along to the well-known house. As I approached the door was softly opened by a relative who for several days had been anxiously watching my arrival. She

at once conducted me upstairs, to what I expected was a sick chamber, when, to my horror, the first thing I saw was the lid of a coffin standing up against the wall, and in the middle of the room was the coffin, with candles burning on either side.

I nearly fell to the ground with this tremendous shock and surprise. There was the dear face, but it seemed absorbed in itself, and to have lost all regard for me. It no longer turned to welcome me, nor was the hand stretched out, as theretofore, to meet mine. All was still; there was no smile—no voice—no welcome—nothing but the silence of death to greet me.

The sight of that coffin, with its quiet inmate, did not awaken sorrow so much as surprise; and with that, something like anger and rebellion.

I was weak and exhausted in body, but strong in wilful insubordination.

Murmuring and complaining, I spoke unadvisedly with my lips.

A gentle voice upbraided me, adding, that I had far better kneel down in submission to God, and say "Thy will be done!" This, however, was not so easy, for the demon of rebellion had seized me, and kept me for three hours in a tempest of anger, filling my mind with hard thoughts against God. I walked about the room in the most perturbed state of mind, so much so, that I grieved my friends, who came repeatedly to ask me to kneel down and say, "Thy will be done!" "Kneel down—just kneel down!" At length I did so, and while some one was praying, my tears began to flow, and I said the words, "Thy will be done!" Immediately the spell was broken and I was enabled to say from my heart, again and again, "Thy will be done!" After this I was conscious of a marvellous change in mind; rebellion was gone, and resignation had come in its place. More than that, the dear face in the coffin seemed to lie smiling in peace, so calm and so lovely, that I felt I would not recall the spirit that was fled, even if it had been possible. There was wrought in me something more than submission, even a lifting-up of my will to the will of God; and withal, such a love towards Him that I wondered at myself. God had been, as it were, a stranger to me before. Now I

felt as though I knew and loved Him, and could kiss His hand, though my tears flowed freely.

The funeral took place the same morning: it was a time of great emotion; sorrow and joy met, and flowed together. I thought of the dear one I had lost, but yet more of the God of love I had found; and to remember that she was with Him was an additional comfort to me. The funeral service was soothing and elevating beyond expression; and yet, when it was all over, such a sense of desolation came upon me, that I felt utterly forlorn and truly sad.

My nest was now completely stirred up; but instead of bemoaning its broken state, I could see the eagle fluttering over her young ones (Deut. 32:1). I was conscious that God was looking on, and that He had not forsaken me in this great wreck.

The strain and excitement I had undergone naturally brought on an illness. I was seized with inflammation of the lungs, and was dangerously ill. From this, and other complications which supervened, the doctor pronounced that I could not recover, and bade me prepare for eternity.

Judges and doctors, when they pass sentence of death, seem to regard religion as necessary preparation for it. Too common, also, is this idea, even among those who do not belong to these respected professions. My own opinion was much the same at that time.

Having received this solemn warning, I took down the Prayer-book, and religiously read over the office for the Visitation of the Sick. I became so interested in this exercise, that I determined to read it three times a day. The prayer for a sick child especially commended itself to my mind, so that, by changing a few words, I made it applicable to my own case, and used it not only three, but even seven, times a day. In substance, it petitioned that I might be taken to heaven if I died; or that, if it should please God to restore my health, He would let me live to His glory. I did not at that time expect my days would be prolonged, nor had I any wish to live, for the world was now perfectly blank and desolate to me. I felt as if I could never be happy again; to be with God would be far better!

I little dreamed that if I had died in that unpardoned and Christless state, I should have been lost forever; for I was profoundly ig-

norant of the necessity of change of heart—perfectly unconscious that I must be born again of the Spirit. This vital truth had never come to my mind; I felt a love for God, and in my ignorance I wished to die.

One morning the thought came to me, as I was sitting all alone by the fire, "What have I been praying for?—that the Lord would take me to heaven if I died; or, if I lived, that He would let me live to His glory?" Why, this is heaven both ways!—heaven in heaven, or heaven on earth—whichever way it pleases God to answer my prayer. Somehow I felt certain that He would answer it. I was exceedingly happy, and could not help thanking Him. From that day I began to feel better, and became impressed with the idea that I was to live, and not die. The doctor smiled at me when I told him so, for he did not believe it. He, and two other physicians, had told me that my lungs were diseased; indeed, six months afterwards, all three sounded me, and declared that one lung was inoperative, and the other much affected.

Yet, notwithstanding the doctor's discouraging announcement—for he told me, also, that "it was one of the fatal signs of consumption for the patient to feel or think he was getting better"—I had a certain conviction that I was to recover. As soon as the medical man had gone, I put on my coat and hat and went out for a walk. I trembled much from weakness, and found it necessary to move very slowly and stop often; but under the shelter of a wall, courting the warmth of the bright-shining sun, I managed to make my way to the churchyard.

While I was sitting there alone, the great bell struck out unexpectedly, and caused me to shake all over; for I was in a very weak condition. It was the sexton tolling to announce the departure of the soul of some villager from the world. Having done this, he came out with his boards and tools to dig the grave. He did not observe me sitting by; so he at once commenced, and went on diligently with his work. The ground had so often been broken before that it did not take him long to accomplish his task; he gradually got deeper and deeper into the ground, till he disappeared altogether from my sight. I crept to the edge of the narrow pit in which he was, and

looking into it, I could not help thinking of those words of Kirke White—

"Cold grave, methinks, 'twere sweet to rest
Within thy calm and hallowed breast!"

I had no fear of death, but rather felt that I should welcome it even more than restoration to health.

I have even now a most vivid remembrance of this, and place it on record to show how delusive' are our feelings: because I did not feel any danger, I took it for granted that there really was none. That day, however, was an eventful one in my life; for, in the gladness of my heart, I gave myself to God, to live for Him. I had given my will before, and now I gave my life, and was happy in the deed. I did not know at that time that faith does not consist in believing that I have given myself, even if I meant it ever so sincerely; but in believing that God has taken or accepted me.

At the outset, I began with the former—a merely human faith—and its result was consequently imperfect. I was spiritually dead, and did not know it. Alas! What multitudes there are who are utterly unconscious of the fact of this spiritual death, though there are few things more plainly declared and revealed in the Word of God.

The full meaning of the word death is too often misunderstood and overlooked. There are three kinds referred to in the Word of God—spiritual, natural, and everlasting. The first is a separation of the soul from God; the second, that of the body from the soul; and the last, that of the unbelieving man, body and soul, from God forever.

It will be seen that there is one characteristic which is common to all three kinds—that is, separation; and that there is no idea of finality—death is not the end. When the Lord God created man, we suppose that He made him not merely in the form of a body, but a man with body and soul complete; and afterwards that He breathed into this living man the Spirit, and he became a living soul. As such, he communed with the eternal God, who is a Spirit. In this spiritual state he could walk and converse with God in the garden of Eden. When, however, he disobeyed the command which had been given

to him, he incurred the tremendous penalty. The Lord God had said, "In the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall surely die." He did eat, and he died there and then; that is, he forfeited that Spirit which had quickened his soul, and thus became a dead soul; though, as we know, he remained a living man for nine hundred years before his body returned to its dust.

By his one act of disobedience, Adam opened in an instant (as an earthquake opens a deep chasm) the great gulf, the impassable gulf of separation which is fixed between us and God. By nature, as the children of Adam, we are all on the side which is away from God; and we are become subject also to the sentence pronounced against the life of the body. We know and understand that we are mortal, and that it is appointed unto men once to die; but we do not seem to be aware of the more important fact of the death of our souls. Satan, who said to our first parents, "Ye shall not surely die," employs himself now in deceiving men by saying, "Ye are not dead;" and multitudes believe him, and take it for granted that it is actually true. Thus they go on unconcerned about this awful and stupendous reality.

CHAPTER 2

Religious Life.

With returning health and strength, I did not think of going back into the world, but rather gave myself more fully to the purpose for which I supposed that my life had been restored. I felt a thankfulness and joy in my recovery, which confirmed me more and more in my determination to live to the glory of God.

When I was able to return to the South, I did so by easy stages till I got back to the neighbourhood of London; and there it was ordered that I should be shut up for the remainder of the winter.

During this season of retirement, I spent my time most happily in reading and prayer, and found great delight in this occupation. I was able to say, with the Psalmist, "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication;" and, like him, I could say, "I will call upon Him as long as I live; I will walk before Him in the land of the living; and I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." That is, in secret or private life; in social intercourse with my fellow-men; and in the worship of the sanctuary, I will seek the glory of God. I used to have much pleasure every day in asking God to give me a deeper sense of His love, that I might unfeignedly thank Him, and show forth His praise with my life as well as my lips.

All this, be it observed, was because God had saved not my soul, but my life; for as yet I had not, like the Psalmist, felt any trouble about my soul. I knew nothing of what he describes as the "sorrows of death and the pains of hell." I had not been awakened by the Spirit to know the danger and sorrow of being separated from God (which is spiritual death). I was perfectly unconscious that between God and myself there was the "impassable gulf" I have already referred to, and consequently I had not experienced such overwhelming anxiety as made the Psalmist cry out, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul." I knew nothing of the necessity of passing from death to life, and therefore I could not say, "The Lord has delivered

my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

The only thing I knew was that God was good to me, and therefore I loved Him, and was thankful, not for the sake of getting His favour, but because I thought I had it. I turned over a new leaf, and 'therewith covered up the blotted page of my past life. On this new path I endeavoured to walk as earnestly in a religious way, as I had before lived in a worldly one.

This mistake into which I fell was natural enough and common as it is natural; but for all this it was very serious, and might have been fatal to me, as it has proved to multitudes. I did not see then, as I have since that turning over a new leaf to cover the past, is not by any means the same thing as turning back the old leaves, and getting them washed in the blood of the Lamb.

I have said before that I did not know any better; nor was I likely to see matters in a clearer light from the line of study in which I was chiefly occupied. I was absorbed for the time, not so much in the Bible as in the "Tracts for the Times"—a publication which was engaging much attention. These Oxford tracts suited me exactly, and fitted my tone of mind to a nicety. Their object was the restoration of the Church of England from a cold, formal condition, into something like reality—from a secular to a religious state; this also was my own present object for myself. I read these writings with avidity, and formed from them certain ecclesiastical proclivities which carried me on with renewed zeal.

I suppose I learned from the perusal of them to interpret the Bible by the Prayer-book, and to regard the former as a book which no one could understand without the interpretation of the Fathers. Certain it is, that I did not look to the Bible, but to the Church, for teaching, for I was led to consider that private judgment on the subject of Scripture statements was very presumptuous. I got, moreover, into a legal state, and thought my acceptance with God depended upon my works, and that His future favour would result upon my faithfulness and attention to works of righteousness which I was doing. This made me very diligent in prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds; and I often sat and dreamed about the works of mercy

and devotion which I would do when I was permitted to go out again.

Like persons in this state of mind, I also relied on ordinances, and was subject to them. I took it for granted that I was a child of God, because I had been baptized and brought into the Church; and having been confirmed and admitted to the Lord's Table, I concluded that I was safely on the way to Heaven. I see now the error of this very earnest devotion, and that I was going about to establish my own righteousness instead of submitting to the righteousness of God. I like to remember these days and tell of them, not because I am proud of them—far otherwise; but because they show the kind forbearance and patience of God towards me, and, besides this, they give me a clearer idea of the state of very many earnest people I meet with, who enter upon a religious path in much the same way.

Such persons make the two mistakes already referred to. They start with believing in their surrender of themselves, instead of God's acceptance of it; and secondly, they make their continuance therein depend upon their repeated acts of devotion. They live and walk by their own works, not by faith in the finished work of Christ. What shall I say to these things? Shall I denounce them as delusions, or superstitious legality? No. I would far rather that people should be even thus religious than be without religious observances—far rather that they should be subject to the Prayer-book teaching than be the sport of their own vain imaginings. If men have not given their hearts to God and received forgiveness of sins, it is better that they should give themselves to a Church than yield themselves to the world and its vanities.

If I had to go over the ground again under the same circumstances, I do not think I could take a better path. Church teaching by itself, with all its legalities, is superior to a man's own inventions; and the form of godliness required by it, even without spiritual power, is better than no form or profession of religion.

To say the least, Church teachings, when it is correctly followed, instructs the conscience, restrains and guides the will, and imparts a practical morality which we do not find in any other system. I have more hope of people who rest in some distinctive and positive dogmas than of those who merely deal with negations. The former

may be reached by spiritual teaching; the latter are but shadowy adversaries with whom it is impossible to engage.

Therefore, when I see a man, for conscience towards God, giving up the world, and taking up with reverential worship, with even superstitious veneration for ecclesiastical things, because they are so—when I see a man, who was careless before, become conscientious and true in all his outward dealings, very particular in his observance of private and public prayer, exercising self-denial, living for others rather than himself, bearing and forbearing in all quietness and meekness—I cannot do otherwise than admire him. This, surely, is far more lovely and admirable than the opposite of these things.

Instead of joining in the outcry against such persons, I feel rather in sympathy, and have a desire in my heart to win them to still better things, and to show them "the way of God more perfectly." I feel that they are stirred as I was, and are struggling in self-righteousness, not because they wilfully prefer it to God's righteousness, but because they are yearning for true and spiritual reality. They are in a transition state, and the more restless they are, the more assured I am that they will never attain real rest and satisfaction to their souls till they have found God, and are found of Him in Christ Jesus.

But the question may be asked, "Is it possible for unsaved people (spiritually dead) to be so good and religious? Is not such a state an indication of spiritual vitality?" I answer, without hesitation, that it is possible. Religion by itself, irrespective of the subject-matter of a creed, may have a quieting and controlling effect upon the soul. The Hindoo, the Moslem, the Jew, the Romanist, as well as the Protestant, may each and all be wonderfully self-possessed, zealous, devout, or teachable, or even all these together, and yet remain dead souls.

As a boy in India, I remember being greatly struck with the calmness of the Hindoos, as contrasted with the impatience and angry spirit of the English. On one occasion I observed one of the former at his devotions. He, with others, had been carrying me about in a palankeen all day in the hot sun. In the evening, he most reverently took from his girdle a piece of mud of the sacred river Ganges, or

Gunga, as they call it, and dissolving this in water, he washed a piece of ground, then, having washed his feet and hands, he stepped on this sacred spot, and began to cook his food. While it was preparing, he was bowed to the ground, with his face between his knees, worshipping towards the setting sun. A boy who was standing by me said, "If you touch that man he will not eat his dinner." In a thoughtless moment I did so with my hand, and immediately he rose from his devotions; but, instead of threatening and swearing at me, as some might have done who belong to another religion, he only looked reproachfully, and said, "Ah, Master William!" and then emptying out the rice which was on the fire, he began his ceremony all over again. It was quite dark before he had finished his "poojah," or worship, and his meal. This man's religious self-possession made a greater impression on me than if he had abused or even struck me, for hindering his dinner. I thought to myself, "I will be a Hindoo when I grow up!" And truly I kept my word, though not in the same form; for what else was I in my earnest, religious days!

This is an important question to settle, and, therefore, I will give three examples from Scripture.

No one can doubt the zeal of Saul of Tarsus. This was no easy-going, charitable creed, which supposes all good men are right. He was sure that if he was right, as a natural consequence Stephen was wrong, even blasphemous, and as such worthy of death. Therefore, he had no scruples about instigating the death of such a one. Notwithstanding all this uncompromising and straightforward religiousness, he needed to be brought from death to life.

Again: look at Cornelius, who was "a devout man that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway" (Acts 10:2). There can be no mistake about this man with such a testimony; and yet he also needed to hear words whereby he and all his house should be saved (Acts 11:14). Next: Nicodemus, I suppose it will be admitted, was an earnest and religious man. Evidently, he was one of those who "believed in the name of Jesus, because he saw the miracles which He did" (John 2:23). This man, humble and teachable as he was, came to Jesus, and said, "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for

no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." Yet he was told, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3). As surely as all mankind are dead in Adam, so surely every man needs spiritual life. In this respect it was no new thing which the Lord Jesus propounded to Nicodemus. The spiritual change of heart he referred to has always been the one condition of intercourse with God. All God's saints, even in the Old Testament times, had experienced 'this. Hence the Lord's exclamation, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"

It may be urged that these three men were not in the Christian dispensation. Let this be granted; but the point at hand is that they needed spiritual life, though they were such good religious men. It will not be very hard to prove that even baptized men in the Christian dispensation need to be raised from death unto life just as much as any other children of Adam. It is clear, both from Scripture and experience, that baptism, whatever else it imparts, does not give spiritual vitality.

St. Peter's testimony is this, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" (Acts 10: 34, 35). Accepted to be saved, not because there is any merit in his works, but because God sees that there is real sincerity in his living up to the light he has. The heathen who know there is a God, and do not worship Him as God, are given over to idolatry (Rom.1); but, on the other hand, those who do worship Him, and give Him thanks, are taken in hand to be guided into life and truth. Therefore are we justified in hoping that earnest and religious men, though they be dead, if their religion is really towards God, will be brought to spiritual life.

It was a happy winter to me, however, notwithstanding my spiritual deficiencies; and the recollection of it still abides in my memory. I had now no desire for the world and its pleasures. My mind had quite gone from such empty amusements and frivolities; even the taste I used to have for these things was completely taken away.