



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

JOHN SLACK OF PAISLEY



JOHN SLACK.

(Photo by J. D. Ritchie, Paisley.)

JOHN SLACK OF PAISLEY

**THE STORY OF
HIS CONVERSION**

TOLD BY HIS SISTER

**TO
THE MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF THE
PAISLEY MISSION**

PREFACE

IN response to the urgent request of friends that the story of my brother's conversion should be told by me, this booklet is sent out on its mission, with much prayer that it may bring glory to God and encouragement to pleading souls to pray on, and that many now in utter darkness may see the Light that John Slack saw and follow as he followed.

A FOREWORD

BY THE REV. S. CHADWICK

JOHN SLACK was the LAZARUS of the Paisley Mission. The story of his conversion, told with such manifest gratitude and artless sincerity needs no word of commendation from me. I have known his sister for nearly twenty years, and can witness to her devotion and service in the work of God and His Church. John Slack I have known since the time of his conversion, and knew of the burden of sorrow he had been for many years. I shall never forget the Saturday morning the Rev. W. H. Rolls sat in my study and told me how John Slack had been won for Christ. Saturday morning callers were not very welcome in those days, but our hearts were deeply moved as we talked together. The following Saturday Thomas Champness came and immediately he placed the new convert on the list of Joyful News Evangelists!

The story witnesses to three cardinal truths of the Christian faith that are of vital importance to the Church of Christ.

1. The power of Christ to save to the Uttermost.

John Slack was notoriously ungodly. Everybody knew him. He was the last man to be suspected of religious inclinations. On Saturday, November 13, 1909 I was addressing a midnight meeting in Southampton. The audience was made up almost entirely of men and many were under the influence of drink. When I spoke of John Slack a man interjected a question, and it turned out they had been companions in many a riotous revel. He was amazed to hear of his conversion, and remarked that he couldn't have believed it. Suddenly Jesus Christ raised him from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. In a moment the habits of a lifetime were sloughed, and left in the empty grave of a dead past. The word of prophecy was fulfilled: 'I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves.

I will put my spirit in you and ye shall live.' The gospel is a message of life and power. It brings salvation to all sinners and despairs of none.

2. The saving power of Christ is the most effective witness to the gospel.

The healed man standing in the midst silenced opposition in Jerusalem, and in Paisley. The unanswerable proof of Christianity is its moral power to quicken and save. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, crowds flocked to see him. 'They came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead'. So it is always. There is nothing so sensational as a miracle. Revivals always bring crowds. Mr. Rolls says, 'His conversion got us a hearing for the gospel. It brought the people by hundreds to our services. It awakened an

interest in our work in every part of the denomination. It made the provision (the New Hall) necessary and stirred up the stewards of God's money to send some for this purpose.' The way to fill churches is through open graves. The remedy for all the ills that flourish on a languishing life is in a gospel that perpetuates the miracle of the empty grave.

3. The power of prayer.

The story of waiting faith will strengthen many hearts. The fellowship of intercession is part of our inheritance. To pray effectively we must bear vicariously. It was because Christ 'bare the sin of many, He made intercession for the transgressor.' The pressure of the burden gives intensity to pleading. For twenty years love wept, and faith claimed. At last the answer came, 'Thy brother shall rise again! The heart's mourning was turned into gladness, and travail was lost in praise. 'The energized prayer of a righteous man is of great force.' Mightier than logic, stronger than reproof, more effective than tears, all things are possible to believing prayer. Out of a full heart has this story been written, and it is sent forth with the prayer that its threefold witness may be blessed to the strengthening and saving of many.

JOHN SLACK OF PAISLEY

IN February, 1883, the Rev. William Haslam, author of *From Death into Life*, came to conduct a fortnight's Mission in a little village near Nottingham, where I lived with a widowed aunt. There was no place of worship except the little church picturesquely situated by the river, where the mission was held. It was such a wonderful time that there was scarcely a house or cottage where someone was not blessed.

I was one of the first. On that bright morning, when all around had taken on a new beauty — for surely the sun had never shone so brightly as on that day when I could say, 'I've been redeemed' — my first thought was that I must write at once and tell my brother John. I resolved, at the same time, to pray for him, until he too should know the Lord Jesus as his Saviour.

I well remember going up the village on that glorious morning to visit one of the choicest Christians I have ever known, to whom I owe more than I can tell, in order to ask her to join me in prayer for my brother. This was the beginning of twenty years of prayer. This elder brother of mine was the idol of my childhood, the kindest and most lovable brother ever girl had, and one of the first sorrows of my life was when we were separated in 1876, he to go to Scotland and I to my aunt.

A year or two later the old home in Sheffield was broken up, and our parents went to Scotland, where for a few years my father and brother were in business together, and very prosperous. When they separated, John continued his business with much success. But alas! Prosperity only afforded him increased opportunity of indulging in the absorbing passion of his life — gambling. His ambition had always been to own racehorses, and now he saw a chance of gratifying that ambition. and the gayest and most reckless part of his life began. Generous, light-hearted, humorous. he was all too eagerly sought after, and at that time his motto seemed to be, 'A merry life for me.' Yet, as was said in an appreciation in the *Paisley Daily Express* after his death, 'In the life he led he was not true to himself, and his sudden conversion and subsequent consecration to the work of our Saviour was not so remarkable after all to those who knew him. Many a time have I stood and listened to his good-humoured banter, which displayed beneath a worldly exterior a heart of gold.'

He came to our wedding in the autumn of 1884, and that was the last time he entered a place of worship, with one exception, until the day he was converted.

Once when I was staying in Paisley for a few days, I begged him to go with me to a service, and at last he said, 'Well, I will, if you will come to Hope Hall. The preacher there is so like your husband that I always listen to him when he is speaking in the open air.' We went, and next day I sought out the minister, and asked him to follow up the small hold he had on John.

My brother's first visit to Paisley was when his horse 'Miss Martyr' was running in the races. She won; and not very long ago, when referring to that time, he said, 'I was a proud man that day, as I led my horse through the cheering crowds, and as the people followed my dog-cart for some considerable distance ; but I am much prouder, and in a very different way, when the crowd gathers to hear me speak for my Master.' His love for the 'turf' led him into the company of the highest and of the lowest, and his pleasures were very costly. By-and-by he had to sell his horses, and then followed a time of down-grade for him and his family, upon which I cannot bring myself to dwell.

About the year 1891, we had a surprise visit from him on his way from Epsom Races. He had lost heavily on the Derby Day, and was very depressed — for him. 'I ought not to have seen you like this,' he said; 'but I could not pass through Leeds without calling.' As I tried to reason with him of the folly of such a life he stopped me with one of his winsome smiles, and, patting me on the shoulder. said, 'There, there, I could not live your life, although sometimes I do see the folly of my own.' Then, taking a white daintily got-up card from his pocket, 'See!' he said, 'I took this from a gentleman on the course for your sake.' I saw at once it was an invitation to a meeting of the Racecourse Mission, and asked eagerly, 'Did you go?' 'No, no, my dear, such things are not for me.'

On the rare occasions we met after this it was easy to see how he was deteriorating, and the accounts we had from mother were sad indeed. Many a heart-broken prayer have we heard from her dear lips at our family altar, and when I would try to cheer her by saying that one day we should have our prayers answered, 'I hope I may live to see it,' she would reply. I believe her great anxiety at this time about her boy was a blessing spiritually to our mother; for she was drawn so near to God in prayer that she began to enjoy again His service as she had done before her marriage. For many years much sorrow and disappointment had dimmed the light which had once shone so brightly. She had named her firstborn alter her father, 'John Ball,' with the hope that he might grow up as good a man. Our grandfather was a loyal Methodist in Nottingham, a prayer-leader, and zealous worker in various ways. His house was always open to ministers, and he counted some of them as his special friends.

For several years I heard from John only on birthdays and at Christmas time. The letter I received in acknowledgement of a parcel sent him at Christmas, 1903, was the first token that God was about to answer prayer. Although I never wrote to him without pleading that he would lead a different life and reminding him of God's willingness to save, this was the first time he had ever referred to anything of the kind. After saying he was ashamed to admit that he had got almost to the bottom rung of the ladder. he ended with, 'Go on living your glorious life, and do not give up praying for me. Who knows but God may yet answer your prayers?' I carried my letter upstairs to my husband, who was ill at the time, and read it to him. We felt sure the Holy Spirit was at work in my brother's heart. Then I spread the letter before the Lord, as Hezekiah did his, and from that day prayed with increased faith.

A week or two later my husband saw an announcement that Josiah Nix was about to have a Gospel Temperance Mission in Paisley. 'Surely,' said he, 'if anyone could help John, it would be Mr. Nix.' We talked it over, and decided I should write to him.

From the time the letter was posted we prayed continuously; our every thought of him was a prayer. The Mission began, and for a whole week we heard nothing. Yet every day our faith grew. On Saturday my husband wrote to John, asking him to go and hear Mr. Nix, forgetting in his zeal that there is no Sunday delivery in Scotland. Sunday morning, the last day but one of the Mission, and with it a letter from Paisley! I took it with childish eagerness, and will give it exactly as I saw it—

'Your letter to hand, I asked the minister, without entering into particulars, to call and see your brother. He did so and then I went myself and had a chat with him. He has promised to come to my service to-morrow, Sunday, and to sign the pledge. He knows the right, and feels, I think, that he must now take a stand for temperance and for God. I shall look out for him, and trust God to bless and save him. Keep believing. God sees your struggle and your love.

'Yours sincerely,

'JOSIAH NIX.'

How thankful we were! *How* we praised God! That Sabbath morning in chapel I was so shut in with God, pleading for John, that I heard nothing of the service until I was startled by hearing the words,

'Thy brother shall rise again.' The second lesson was being read, and our Lord's words to Martha came directly from Him to me as a glorious promise that my brother, who was 'dead in trespasses and sins,' should 'rise into newness of life.' I heard no more, but just praised my Lord for answered prayer; and together we thanked Him in our home for His promise, given in such a striking way. We had not a doubt that John would be 'born again' that day.

Monday, no word! Tuesday morning, another letter from Mr. Nix, and one from John himself. Here are the contents of both:

'You will be pleased to hear that your brother came to our morning service yesterday, came forward to the table, signed the pledge, walked into the vestry, and gave every evidence that he has started a new life. He was present at night, and entered heartily into the service. Mr. Rolls is a good man, and will look after him. The people all know him, and are prepared to do what they can to help him. I rejoice with you, and will pray that he may be kept.

'Yours sincerely,

'JOSIAH NIX.'

'Your kind letter to hand, but the war was over when it came. The minister here came three times last week, once with Mr. Nix, and I promised to go to the morning service. I did so. I signed the pledge, and then went into an ante-room where they prayed for me; and where at last I prayed to God myself. Before I left I was a new man, rejoicing and thanking God. I shall attend all the meetings I can, and of course try to get others to come to Christ. I do not intend to keep this to myself. Dear brother, shall I be wrong in thinking that my sister has written to Mr. Nix? It seems all so strange that they should be so determined to save me. I must thank you for your kind letter, and above all I thank you and my sister for your constant prayers for me, which have been answered at last. I do thank God for His mercies.

'Your affectionate brother,

'JOHN SLACK.'

Here my brother shall give his own account of that Mission week, for I remember almost every word that he told us in our home, when we sent for him a few weeks after his conversion.

'I was in a desperate fix at that time, and ready to do almost anything to provide for my family. Just then a man I knew asked me to join him for a week's sale, coupled

with singing competitions and other entertainments. I could not refuse, for there seemed no other way. We opened in the little place, where the friends from the mission found me. From the first it was a failure. The weather was very bad, and we were too near the Theatre and Hippodrome, both of which had special attractions that week. What a miserable week I had! There was so little doing that I had time to think. If I had had money, I should have been drinking to prevent my thinking. As it was, I saw to what depths I had fallen, and loathed the life I was living for the first time.

Mr. Rolls called twice to invite me to the Mission, but I would not promise to go. Then on the Saturday he brought Mr. Nix, and I began to wonder why they were bothering about me. As I was wishing they would go, Mr. Nix said, "We have met before. Don't you remember me?" (I had told him in my letter of the incident of the invitation card at "The Derby")

"I feel as if I had seen you somewhere,"

I replied. "Yes!" he said, "on Epsom Downs one Derby day, some years ago."

"I remember now. You gave me a little card which I took to show my sister."

By this time I was interested in the man. I listened to what he had to say, and promised to go the next day to hear him. On Sunday morning I awoke early and could not rest in bed, a most unusual thing for me. I remembered my promise, and was anxious to get the service over. I went. You know the result. Divine power gripped me once I was inside; and when Mr. Nix invited those who wished to sign the pledge to go forward, I immediately went, and felt strangely moved as I walked up the Hall to hear a heart-felt "Thank God!" from one and another. After I had signed, Mr. Rolls put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Will you not go all the way, Mr. Slack?" "I will go all the way," I replied, "if you will tell me how." We went into a room behind with Mr. Nix, and they each prayed. After a silence and a great struggle, I felt a desire to pray to God for forgiveness. I saw myself a great sinner, and the thought that, knowing this, He yet loved me, broke me down, and I prayed aloud for the first time in my life.

Another silence! A holy calm was filling me, a sense of sin forgiven. I cannot explain the mystery. I only know as the blind man knew, "that whereas I was blind, now I see."

"I went home a new man in Christ Jesus.

I told my wife what had happened, and the drink that was in the house I emptied down the sink. From that time the desire for it has never returned. I went to the service again at night, and it was, indeed, a blessed time. Never can I forget the singing of—

Bring them in, bring them in,

Bring them in from the fields of sin:

Bring them in, bring them in,

Bring the wandering ones to Jesus.

‘I praised God in that service that, though I was a wanderer far away in the fields of sin, I had been brought to Jesus.

‘Next morning, as I went down the street, a publican who knew me well was standing at his door. “Good morning. Mr. Slack,” said he; “come in and have a drink.” “No, thank you,” I replied; “I’ve signed the pledge.” He laughed, and said, “When?” “Yesterday noon.” “Well, well. I prophesy you will soon break that.” “I shall not break it,” I said, “for I have given my heart to God, *and He has taken away the desire for it.*” “Oh,” said he. “*that* makes all the difference!”

‘Night came and with it a heavy downpour of rain; and you know how it can rain in Scotland. I had been praying all day that God would enable me to go to the last meeting of the Mission, but, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible. I was pledged to my partner, and must take my place as advertised. Still, I trusted that a way would be made, and it was. The wind howled round the building, and the rain came down in torrents. When my partner came in he said, “This is a poor look-out. We shall not take what will pay for lighting.” “No,” said I, “much better close. We are out of pocket enough already.” And in disgust he replied, “We will, and go over to the theatre.”

I said nothing, but my heart was singing. Never was rain so providential. We closed, and saying a hurried “Good-night, I am not going to the theatre, but you can come with me to the Hall if you like”—at which he turned from me with a look of astonishment—I ran round to the Hall. Surely heaven cannot be much more lovely than that meeting was to me.’ When he had finished, we told him of our experience during that week, and as he listened he exclaimed, ‘Now I understand. I might have

known it.' The story of that Sunday, with God's promise to me, broke him down utterly, and he could only say, 'Wonderful! Wonderful!'

Our mother joined us that day, and the next morning — Easter Sunday — at our family altar, she heard her son pray for the first time. When we got up from our knees he crossed the room to her chair, and, kneeling beside her, said, 'Mother, mother, can you forgive me for all the pain I have caused you in the past?' I could bear no more, but as I was leaving the room I heard her say, 'It is all forgotten at this moment, my boy.'

On that Sunday he had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Chadwick—to whom he never ceased to be grateful for the part he took in his appointment to the mission staff—and of being present on the rostrum at the evening service in Oxford Place Chapel.

Every time John came afterwards, almost his first words were, 'I must see Mr. Chadwick, and hear him.' Four names were sacred to him: Mr. Rolls, Josiah Nix, Mr. Chadwick, and Mr. Champness. To them and the Methodist Church, under God, he felt he owed everything.

One more reference to that wonderful week. Two years ago last January, Josiah Nix conducted a Gospel Temperance Mission in the Coliseum, Leeds. Mr. Chadwick asked John to help him in the open air and after-meetings. It was a touching sight to me to see Mr. Nix and my brother together for the first time. On one of the days, after having had tea with Mr. and Mrs. Nix and several old friends, we sat chatting round the fire before the evening meeting. Suddenly Mr. Nix turned to me, and said, 'I suppose by this time your brother knows about your writing to me?' 'Yes, he does,' I replied. 'Then you shall all hear my story now.'

'I got to Paisley just as it was getting dark. Mr. Rolls met me. It was a disagreeable day, cold and drizzling rain. As we drove to the manse Mr. Rolls said to me, "I hope we may have a good time; but things do not look promising." The words were as dampening as the weather, but I said. "Oh, it will be all right. I feel sure we shall have much blessing." "Well, I trust so," said he. "By the way, here are some letters for you."

'I saw what one or two were at a glance. Then came one in a strange handwriting. I opened it, and made it out as we passed the lamps. "Why, here is encouragement already. Do you know a Mr. John Slack? No? Well, pray for him. His sister has written to me about him." I gave him a few particulars, but did not read it, as you had written confidentially. I kept reminding Rolls about it. "Are you praying for John Slack, brother? Pray on!" 'When we got to the workers' meeting later, I asked,

“Does anyone know a Mr. John Slack?” Yes, all of them did. “Pray for him, then,” I said. “Pray believingly, pray all the time And let him be visited and invited to the Mission, and let me know when he comes!”

‘How I bothered brother Rolls! “Are you praying for John Slack? Let us have prayer for John Slack!” And so on. But a week passed, and he had not been to

a meeting. On the Saturday I asked Mr. Rolls to take me to see him, and we went to the little place where he was selling. As we entered he was playing a melodeon, which he immediately put down, and received us with the politeness and brightness that I found afterwards were characteristic When I reminded him of that Derby Day some years before, he became interested, and after a little plain talk he promised to come and hear me the next day. You know the rest, John, my friend.’

How John had listened to his story! The big tears fell down his face as Mr. Nix told of the prayer that went on for him. Then they clasped hands, and I am not ashamed to say we were all quietly weeping.

After Mr. Nix had spoken with great power in the meeting on the curse of gambling, drink, and their sister vices, he called on John to pray. I see him now as he stepped to the front of the platform. I hear again his voice, as the words rang out, filling the Coliseum: ‘O God, *Thou canst save the gambler, for Thou hast saved me! Thou canst take away even the desire for drink, for Thou hast done it for me.*’

.

Now I must go back in my story to the week following his conversion. Mr. Rolls was preaching in Leeds on the Sunday, and came to see us on the Saturday afternoon. It was good indeed to meet him, and to hear the story from his lips. He told us how he had called on my brother to speak at the open-air meeting, of the great crowd gathered there, and of how John, standing in the centre of the ring, said—

‘Mr. Rolls was right in saying I needed no introduction to you. My voice is no strange one. You have heard me speak on various topics, but you have never heard me speak for the Lord Jesus Christ before. You have seen the *Sporting Chronicle* in my hand many times, but never a Bible before. I do not know much about this Book, but I mean to know more. I thank God I have a new Master. I’ve served the devil long enough ; I am now a servant of the Lord Jesus.’

I told Mr. Rolls I hoped they would give him work, for, strange to say, I had always thought what a preacher he would have made under different circumstances.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘I have just come from Mr. Chadwick, who has been deeply interested and moved by the story. We have wept together, and what do you think he said? That we ought not to give the devil a moment’s chance with such a man; God does not save men like that for nothing: Why not put him on your mission staff?’ I said I felt it was a God-given thought, and we agreed to pray that, if it were, the way might be opened. Mr. Chadwick himself undertook to find the money, but before the end of eight days he had told the story to Mr. Champness, who would not hear of his taking the burden of extra money-raising, and undertook to support John as a Joyful News evangelist. This he continued to do until his death. It was a great disappointment to my brother that he never met Mr. Champness, though he heard from him at intervals. The last letter he had from him was specially treasured.

‘DEAR BROTHER SLACK.

‘I have just sent Mr. Rolls your money for another year. It may be the last time I can do it, but have no fear! He who caused the ravens to feed Elijah can provide for you, and He will.

‘With all good wishes,

‘Yours in His service,

‘THOMAS CHAMPNESS.’

During the next week, this dear servant of God was called to higher service.

In this way was made possible the work of those five and a half memorable years. At his first cottage meeting seventeen signed the pledge, and two were converted. He never spoke or preached without blessing. Many a betting man did he recognize in the open-air services, and often one or another would touch him on the arm when he had finished speaking, and ask for a pledge-card. ‘Many a pledge has been signed on my knee,’ he told us. ‘I go down on one knee, and make a table of the other.’ Always he was busy about the Master’s business. Often I have said to him. ‘You work too hard; you ought to take more care of yourself.’ His answer was ever the same, ‘I must do all I can. You see, I have so much time to make up.’

It was good to notice, each time he came to us, how the effects of the past ten years were falling away. Last Christmas we were specially struck with his radiant expression, and with the heavenly light in his kind blue eyes. Considering the self-

satisfied life he had lived for so long, his humility was wonderful. The secret of it all was, I believe, the life of prayer he lived. He had sorrows, and much to try him that the world knows not of, but his faith never wavered. He had indeed the love of God within him as 'glowing fire.' His compassion for the poor, the sinful, the suffering, was touching to see.

Of his work as lay agent to the Mission, Mr. Rolls shall speak in the words of his memorial sermon, preached from the text, 'My brother and fellow-soldier!' There is a striking sentence in the book of Jeremiah, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently." My brother John could not have earned that curse if he had tried. His temperament would not have allowed him. All his soul was put into his work. He worked for this Mission and for the poor of this town with all his might, and even before the call came he was often very tired in the work, though never weary of it. ...

'There was something in his appearance that suggested the military man; so smart, clean, alert, and upright. As a recruiting-sergeant for King Jesus, Paisley has seen few to equal him. He enlisted for Christ on Sunday, got his first recruit on Monday, bore his first testimony on the following Sunday, and has never been off duty since. Every day has brought its battle, every week its victory. I have known converts who gloried in the sins and follies of their unregenerate days, but John Slack's conversion was so complete that these things were a pain and grief to him. Some of us thought that he was more reticent about his past than he ought to have been, that he might have used it more than he did as a base of warning to others; but the Lord Jesus Christ so captured him, so satisfied every craving of his soul, so filled every part of his nature, that he was ever pressing on to richer experiences of His love. The supreme quality of his life was a passion for Jesus Christ. ...

'Of his work for this Mission it is difficult to speak without seeming to use the language of exaggeration. Many have taken an important part in securing these buildings for the worship of God and the service of humanity. If I give John Slack the first place. I shall only speak what I believe to be true. When he was converted it seemed very unlikely that the Wesleyan Church in Paisley would, within five years, have the largest, best-appointed, and best-situated building for Christian work in the town; yet it is ours today. His conversion got us a hearing for the gospel. It brought the people by hundreds to our services. It awakened an interest in our work in every part of the denomination. It made the provision necessary, and stirred up the stewards of God's money to send some for this purpose. The greatest day of his life was when he laid his memorial stone in this building, and placed £164 upon it. ...

‘A pastor is one of God’s choicest gifts to His Church. There is no gift more difficult to cultivate than the pastoral gift. My brother had that gift by nature. He was genial, generous, magnetic, humorous; and when he placed these gifts upon the altar, they made him an ideal pastor. He loved the company of the people in their homes ; his simple faith and earnest prayers and infectious joy in Christ left a blessing in every home he entered. As an open-air preacher he excelled all I have known. He had a trumpet voice, a rich store of experiences upon which to draw, a most attractive personality, a good command of simple language; and all these were consecrated to telling the old, old story of Jesus and His love.’

A year after his first mission Mr. Nix paid a return visit to Paisley. He refers to it in a letter published in the Report this year. ‘I saw something which gave me one of the keenest delights I have ever had. I was on the top of a tramcar, and, as I was passing along, I saw a notice in big letters, “This site has been purchased for a Wesleyan Mission Hall.” Yes, on the very site where I first met John Slack. I shouted, “Glory!” and did not care who heard me.

‘Now I have been a third time — the Hall is erected and opened. The first word when I saw it was, “What hath God wrought!”’

The stone-laying was a wonderful time. The following is taken from the *Methodist Recorder* :—

‘The dramatic moment was the more dramatic because it was entirely unpremeditated and unrehearsed. When it came to the turn of John Slack to place his stone, it fell to Josiah Nix to present the mallet. In ringing tones Josiah told how he found John below where they stood, and how now he was to place a stone on that very spot. “It is the proudest moment of my life.” Then laying both his hands on John’s shoulders, the two men stood, a glorious and most eloquent object-lesson to the thousands of interested spectators. Ringing cheers greeted John Slack’s simple words, “I asked God for a hundred pounds; He has given me a hundred and sixty-four!”’

The following week John had a letter in the Connexional newspapers as follows :—

‘Our stone-laying is past. As a glorious memory of the great goodness of our Heavenly Father it will ever abide. He has answered prayer, answered gloriously.



THE CENTRAL HALL, PAISLEY.

[face p. 34.]

I asked Him and the Methodist people for £100 to place on my stone. It was my joy to place £164. Praise the Lord! Six days before the stone-laying I had received £70. Then cheques and postal orders poured in upon me. Every time I went into the street I was stopped, and coins were put into my hand It was like living in the Golden Age. Three hundred and eleven persons helped me to raise £164. Scores of them were Paisley people, but money came from every quarter. My stone represents gifts from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. My heart overflows with thankfulness to God and all who helped me.'

I went to the opening of the Hall in 1908, a life-long friend of John's and my own accompanying me. At the Saturday night meeting my brother presided, and his first words were, 'Underneath the spot where I now stand Mr. Rolls found me. I praise God for what He has done for me since then, and for allowing me to see this day.' Little did I think that, within eight months, I should be in that Hall again, when it would be packed to its utmost capacity, the platform occupied by many of the same ministers, his coffin the central object just underneath where he stood that night.

It was a treat to me to have him point out different people, and to hear the stories he had to tell of them. One or two may be given. 'See this fellow! He was just a loafer. I saw there was something good in him; and after much persuasion and many prayers he signed the pledge and came to the services. This is the first time he has worn a collar.' Then, shaking hands with him and giving him a kindly pat on the shoulder, he said, 'You look right nice the night. ye ken.'

'There's a man who was a drunkard and a gambler. Now he is as keen in winning men for Christ as ever he was about a race.'

'Here comes another. He is an Irish-man. I wish you could hear him give his testimony. I must have you speak to him.' When I had done so, he said, 'He was telling us one night in the meeting that a man had asked him how he could believe in the story of Jonah. "Fancy," said this man. "believing that a fish swallowed a man!" "Shure!" said our Irish friend," that's no difficulty of moine, seeing as how Oi've swallowed a row of houses meself, and me own nice home as well. But now Oi've done with the drink Oi'm getting the house furnished again. Shure, and Jonah's no difficulty of moine at all, at all!"'

.

Last Whitsuntide we were expecting him to bring mother to us, on his way to see his old friends in Sheffield. Thursday was the day fixed, but on the Wednesday we heard he was not well — had caught, as they thought, an internal chill. It was impossible for him to travel just then. On Friday morning the news came that it was appendicitis, and that an operation was necessary. In the afternoon a telegram arrived, telling that the operation was over, but that he was very weak. Half an hour later another message — he had passed away. It was a terrible blow, but we were able to praise God for granting him those five-and-a-half years of service.

We went to Paisley on the Saturday, and as we were leaving our home, our maid, who has been with us for many years, put a little money in my hand, saying, ‘Will you put a few flowers on Mr. Slack for me in memory of his prayers?’ When we reached Paisley Mr. Rolls came to us, and gave us details of the last two days of John’s life. When told that an operation was necessary and that he must be taken to the Infirmary he seemed distressed, and begged that he might remain at home. Mr. Rolls suggested prayer, and John said, ‘Yes, brother, pray!’ There came great peace during that prayer, a restful look upon his face, and an absolute calmness took possession of him which never left him. A premonition, too, of the approaching end was given him, for, as he was being carried downstairs, his father stood at the top, and John turning his eyes upon him said, ‘I am going home to God, father; won’t you get ready to follow me?’ He also said to his mother and his wife, ‘I shall not come back again, but I am going to my Heavenly Father,’

We were all deeply indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Rolls for their loving-kindness during that trying time. All responsibility was taken from the family; they arranged everything and found many ready helpers at the Mission. Not the Mission only, but all Paisley seemed to be mourning with us. He had loved Paisley, and had given himself to the work; now it was the people’s turn to show their love for him. Through all the sadness there seemed to us much that was glorious. God had used him in a very special manner, and he was ripe for the Kingdom. There was the joy also of seeing his eldest son give himself to God. He came to us on the morning of the funeral, and told us that he had had no sleep all night, that he could not follow his father to the grave until he had found his father’s Saviour. My brother had been very anxious that this young married son should lead a different life; and now ‘he being dead, yet speaketh.’ As soon as he had trusted God for Christ’s sake to forgive his sins, he said. ‘I always knew my father would bring me to God some time. *I never thought it would be like this.*’ He said in his last letter to us, ‘I am *living* now. I only *existed* before. If only I had done this in my father’s lifetime.’ Mr. Rolls says,

‘William has a new face, and he is trying to win others for Christ. He goes to his father’s class and sits in his place.’

Those who were present at the service on Whit Sunday morning, when his coffin rested in the ‘prayer-room’ just where he had so often stood to conduct his class and other meetings, can never forget it. Minister and people mourned together, yet, though it is difficult to describe, there was a brightness. Perhaps it was as one said to me, ‘We mourn for our loss, but it is beautiful, and so easy, to picture him in the glory.’

Shortly before we left his home for the funeral service, a woman, with such a kind face, came from a village feast which was being held a few miles away. She was deputed to convey the sympathy of the ‘travellers.’ ‘We all loved him,’ said she, ‘for he never talked to us as though we were different from other people. That is why he did so much good amongst us.’ Then she told me very simply how she and several members of her family had been led to the Saviour by John; finishing up with, ‘He’ll see many of us in heaven, by-and-by, that he has shown the way.’

I have been in a tramcar with him when he has crossed over to ask a man how he was and when he was coming to the Hall; and found afterwards that it was some publican he had known. He never passed one such, nor any old betting friend, without a kind word and an invitation.

I have felt my dear brother very near as I have written his story. I know he would say if he could, ‘Say as little as you can of me, and give all the praise and glory to my Saviour.’ But it is through showing what the Lord Jesus Christ made of him that He is glorified.

Of the funeral, the reports given at the time shall speak. The *Paisley Daily Express* for Tuesday, June 1, says—

‘Seldom has the funeral of any man elicited so great a display of public interest and sympathy as did that of the late Mr. John Slack, which took place yesterday afternoon at Hawkhead Cemetery. It leaves behind it a memory which only the passing of time can efface, and afforded the highest testimony of the public feeling towards the deceased. The funeral service was conducted at three o’clock in Central Hall by Mr. Rolls. As the coffin was being carried into the Hall, followed by the widow and family, it was met by the pastor, who performed the burial service

according to the rites of the Methodist Church. Those taking part in the service included the Rev. S. W. Stocker (Chairman of the District) and the Rev. John Elsworth, Secretary. The large Hall was crowded with a sympathetic audience. Among those present were Provost Muir MacKeen and ex-Provost Eadie.

‘After the lesson had been read by the Rev. John Elsworth, the congregation joined in singing Dr. Watts’ well-known hymn—

Give me the wings of faith to rise

Within the veil and see

The saints above, how great their joys.

How bright their glories be.

‘The Rev. J. F. Padkin read a portion of Scripture, and the Rev. S. W. Stocker offered prayer. The service concluded with the singing of one of his favourite hymns—

There’ll be no dark valley when Jesus comes

To gather His loved ones home.

‘Outside, while the service was going on, thousands of townspeople had assembled, and the shopkeepers in the vicinity had closed their doors as a mark of respect. *En route* the main street was densely crowded; nearly all the shops on the Glasgow Road closed their doors, and the blinds were drawn.’

My father called my attention to a crowd of men of all ages and stations at one corner of the route, standing respectful and bare-headed as we passed. He said they were betting men of all grades who had assembled together to show their respect to their old associate.

In the *Methodist Recorder* and the *Methodist Times* for June 3 the following paragraph appears :—

‘On Monday he was laid to rest in Hawkhead Cemetery. Prior to the interment a service was held in the Central Hall. The Rev. W. H. Rolls conducted, assisted by the Revs. S. W. Stocker, J. Elsworth, W. H. Gibbs, and J. Padkin, one of the Presbyterian ministers of Paisley, and supported by the Revs. R. W. Watson, W. H. Lake, and A. Adlington, and Messrs. G. Farquhar, D. Ritchie, D. Dram, T.

McCrossan, and other laymen from Glasgow. The Provost and ex-Provost, with several members of the Town Council, were present, and the people were there, poor and well-to-do. The great crowd that cheered him at his stone-laying were again present on Monday, mourning his loss and reverently showing their respect. ...

‘The crown of his life was on Monday. When he was carried to his resting-place amid the love and tears and reverence of the multitude, thousands of whom knew him as their only shepherd. We do not look for emotion in Scotland, but on Monday there was deep emotion, manifested in poor and rich. When his body was brought in there was one great sob. If Methodism had only won John Slack in Paisley it might count all its expenditure justified; but, thank God, he is one of many Mr. Rolls has as the crown of his rejoicing.

‘At the grave the Revs. W. H. Rolls and S. W. Stacker undertook the Committal Service. At the close, “Rock of Ages” was impressively sung by the great concourse of people. John Slack was a great gift of God to Paisley and the Paisley Mission, and the fragrance of his beautiful life will never pass away.’

The story is told. It has been a labour of love. My last word shall be one of praise to the loving Father, who drew my brother from the ‘far country’ to a life of prayer and service for those who were still there. The same love has called him to a higher sphere ‘The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’

The beautiful Hall at Paisley stands as a monument to the grace of God revealed in the salvation of John Slack; and whoever preaches within its walls will be able to point to the tablet whereon his name is graven, as a proof that ‘He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.’

But none of the ransomed ever knew

How deep were the waters crossed,

Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed
through.

Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

Out in the desert He heard its cry,

Sick and helpless and ready to die.

Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way, That mark out the mountain's track?

They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.

Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?

They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.

And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,

And up from the rocky steep,

There rose a cry to the gate of heaven—

Rejoice, I have found My sheep!

And the angels echoed around the throne,

Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!