

“James Laing: A Boy of Full Stature”

Amongst the treasures bequeathed to us through the writings of the Godly Robert Murray McCheyne is the account of the conversion and the subsequent early death of a young boy by the name of James Laing. McCheyne entitles his account – "Another Lily Gathered," and the depth of conviction and spiritual insight unfolded in the earthly pilgrimage of this young boy of "Full Stature" should make each and every one of us examine himself, and, especially our dealings with the young.

There was no "holding back" of the sternest of truths in the preaching men like McCheyne, even when preaching to those of tender years. "You are not too young to be converted and brought to Christ. If you die without Christ, you will surely perish. The most of you are wicked, idle, profane, prayerless, ungodly children ... if you die thus, you will have your part in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone." How readily would McCheyne—although lauded today—be accepted today, with such preaching? And yet, it was such preaching that made the roots of this tender plant, Jamie Laing sink deeply into those two great prerequisites to any assurance of salvation: "Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

James Laing was born on 28th July 1828 and while still only a boy of eight years old was bereft of his mother through the fever that was to later lay hold on him, as well, and usher him into Christ's presence. "The first time that James showed any concern for his soul," McCheyne tells us, "was in the autumn of 1839." those were the days of Revival at St. Peter's where McCheyne was Pastor, and "even strangers were forced to say, 'Surely God is in this place.'" Jamie's elder brother and his sister had both been awakened during these days of refreshing, and how heart-warming a scene is painted for us on one occasion when the young "mother" of the house – Jamie's older sister – returns home from the meeting to find her two brothers upon their knees "earnestly crying for mercy." "Jamie feels he needs Christ too," the older boy confides in his sister; but, Jamie's "need", like many before and since, proved to be like the "morning dew that passeth away."

But, the Holy Spirit was abroad in power in those days, and young and all as Jamie Laing was, the workings of the Reprover were becoming more and more evident in his life. Picture the young boy as he leaves yet another service unconverted—"come away with out Christ tonight again."

"He kept close by the wall of the Kirk," we are told, "that he might escape observation." See him as the tears flowed down his cheeks at the reading of God's Word in the Sabbath school, and we may well encounter something of the soul in anguish – be that soul ever so young.

"The day of Immanuel's power, and the time of his love, was, however, near at hand," McCheyne informs us. The fever had now taken hold on the young life, and there lay before the young boy many months of violent suffering. Yet, out of all the tribulation, God was going to bring glory to His Name and salvation to the soul of the boy in need. How steep and hard the climb to the summit of the mountain before the plain sweeps out before us; so it is with the convicted sinner in agony of soul. "Have I only to believe that Jesus died for sinners? Is that all?" How simple the way of salvation seemed to him now. But, it was because he had had to climb to the summit of the hill of wrath that he could now, so clearly, see, the plain of mercy.

That his salvation had been "all of grace", the young lad never doubted. It was Jesus that he had cried for in his time of need, and Jesus only, who had met that need. Murray McCheyne tells us of the day that he spoke to him from the verse: "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake." The verse worked in his young heart until it raised his invalid frame in glory to his Saviour: "Ah, tha's it," he called out to his sister, "...it's no! for my righteousness' sake, but for *His* righteousness." "Surely God was his teacher," comments McCheyne, "for God alone can reveal the sweetness and glory of this truth to the soul of man!"

How often in the history of Christ's Church, has the deathbed become the pulpit. Even so, was the death-bed of young James Laing. He ministered to all and sundry from his dying pillow—for all came to his bedside to dwell on the words that fell like honey from his lips. But, it was especially on those boys of his own age and interests that his words fell with most power. "I have sinned with you," he used to tell them as they gathered around his bed when the Sabbath school was ended, "now I would like you to come to Christ with me." "Here are two awful verses – (he went on),

'There is a dreadful hell,
And everlasting pains;
There sinners must with devils dwell
In darkness, fire, and chains."

"Then pointing to the fire," McCheyne tells us, "he said, 'You could not keep your finger long there; but, remember, *hell* is a lake of fire.'" "Go and tell Jesus that you are poor, lost, hell-deserving sinners, and tell Him to give you a new heart. Mind, He's willing, but Oh, be earnest! You'll no get it unless ye be in earnest."

Jamie's concern over the friends that he may have misled in his young life weighed heavily upon him as he lay on his bed. He confessed to his sister that one day during the Revival he had torn-up one of God's "promises" that had been handed to him and laughed at the boy who gave it. "Oh Margaret," he cried, "if I hadna laughed at him, maybe he would have sought Christ until he had *found* Him." Perhaps it was this tender conscience that motivated his desire to see his fellows saved along with him. "Seek Jesus young," he pled with one boy, "for it's easier

to find Christ when we're young." He also, knew the value of a minister who solemnly warned, both young and old, of their soul's condition: "... go you to our Kirk," he exhorted this boy, David, "go you to our Kirk, and he will tell you the way to come to Christ." And how touchingly practical the young saint is as he puts his earthly house in order before he leaves for that city "eternal in the heavens," for, to this same David he bids his sister, "Give him my Sunday trousers and my new boots, that he might go to the Church." Two things shine pre-eminently clear in the realization of young James Laing: The knowledge of his poverty by nature and his riches by grace. The ill, spent body of his young son was grief to Jamie's father and once he called him, "Poor Jamie." With the boy's words we must conclude: "Ah, father, don't call me poor ... five minutes of heaven will make up for all this." He was ready to "meet death in Christ." "Oh, Margaret, I see it must be all Jesus from beginning to end ... they that have Christ have all things."

So be it.