

Richard Morris

Rev. Henry Craik, Bristol

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REV. HENRY CRAIK, BRISTOL.*

BY THE REV. R. MORRIS, CLIFTON.

SCOTLAND has seldom given to the South a richer gift than that received in the life and character of HENRY CRAIK. Scotch adventurers may be found everywhere, while her sons of toil, genius, and culture, adorn every land; but in our deceased fellow-citizen we have lost one whose adventurous spirit was controlled by a deep-toned piety, and whose ripe scholarship and unadorned eloquence of life and tongue made his presence amongst us of incalculable worth. Happily he was a man of appreciated goodness and felt power. In life he never affected to despise the judgment of others. Their approbation was ever welcome, if obtained in the service of his Lord. He knew well that to be esteemed was a power as well as a privilege; and often did he seek entrance for the truth into some heart into which already he had been admitted. Next to the approbation of God, was the approval of man. To know that by faithful preaching he won the affection and trust of his hearers, was the gracious help and reward that he knew came from his Father's hands. To feel that an abiding consistency of character was gradually subduing enmities and conciliating friendship, gratified his heart. He accepted in his earthly pilgrimage the fellowship and smiles of his brethren with cheerful gratitude, and never did he refuse them but when they involved the frown of his God. If to be loved and trusted endeared life to him, his memory may be cherished as a fitting tribute to its worth. He was the last to desire a complimentary epitaph when gone, but the first to wish to hold a place after death in the memory and affection of the good and faithful.

We sincerely trust the memoir to be published of this esteemed servant of Christ will give to the public a definite and living portrait of his character. The events of his life were simple; they were neither startling nor unusual. By the side of his esteemed colleague, the Rev. Mr. Müller, it appears tame and unimpressive. The Orphan House and its Christian missions have so striking an effect from their diffusive beneficence, and the thrilling report of their dependence and yet increasing progress, that the quiet ministrations of Henry Craik have almost escaped the attention of the public. But his life and character were full of incident and meaning. His character was unique, his life singular. They may be made productive of great good. Though dead he yet speaks. We sincerely trust that the {163} voice coming even from the grave will be listened to by many an obedient ear and loving heart.

It was encouraging to find that without concert or appointment, nearly every Nonconformist pulpit witnessed to the public loss. Each minister appeared to feel that the hosts had lost a great captain; and the congregations were addressed with an earnestness and affection that were a noble and spontaneous tribute of esteem. His character some had learned from report, others by happy experience. There was no discord in the solemn utterances that gave testimony to the power and usefulness of the prophet whom the church had lost. In almost every pulpit of the city and neighbourhood had his voice been heard, and his form was familiar to all. It was proper that the first echo of the admonitions and consolations of the grave, should be heard in these consecrated houses of prayer. His sober exposition of the Divine Word had often been listened to, and his earnest appeals and impressive admonition felt, by those who now heard their minister's interpretation of that solemn voice that came to them from the dead.

* This Memoir is published as a pamphlet by Mr. W. Mack, 38 Park Street, Bristol.

His appearance was at times almost grotesque, and but for a watchful home, we suspect it would have been as alien from the ordinary secular, as from the clerical garb. We have sometimes been with him when the broken umbrella, his faithful friend, and the oldest hat, have, by mistake, been donned for the best attire. The collar of the coat was looking after the sleeves, and the necktie had comfortably nestled itself behind the head; when in such a state he had just come to the surface after a deep digging for a Hebrew root, or a dive into the depths of authorities to see whether the Keri of the Hebrew should be admitted into the text. His intense devotion to the study of the Scriptures made criticism a recreation, and in his most humorous, impassioned, or depressed moments it was never unwelcome; when amidst beautiful scenery, and affected almost to tears by its witchery, a passage of the Divine Word would come to crown the scene; but with it would occur the readings and interpretations that reverence or enmity had ever suggested. Nor did this break the spell. If a critical friend was present, nature would have to wait till the moot point was settled. Then the landscape came afresh, the more fascinating and beautiful that it had not rebuked his momentary forgetfulness of its charms. Poetry and sentiment at times lured, but never mastered him; he could enjoy the one and indulge the other. They were recreations enjoyed, but not obeyed.

His unsuspecting nature and purity of character were without weakness, but not without peril: they exposed him to deception. When doubt of truthfulness was awakened, his watchfulness and resoluteness proved that his simplicity was only guilelessness, and his trustfulness the triumph of charity. He was ever ready to confide, slow to detect, but when deceived indignant in rebuke. Intentional deception he could not endure.

While lowly in appearance and spirit, he was neither unmanly in bearing nor cringing in disposition. He yielded, perhaps, too much to rank and station, but nothing to arrogance or pretence. It was congenial with his feelings to see a great historian become a great peer, or a great orator an honoured statesman, but the assumptions of mere wealth and vanity were his abhorrence. In his severest moods he never repelled; indignant without malice; resolute in defence, but never audacious; he {164} won the esteem of all. To be acquainted with him was to respect him, and to know him was to love him. His trustful conversation, kindly fellowship, Scotch reminiscences, love of fatherland, English sympathies, devout spirit, made him, to the few, more of a model friend than he had been accepted by the many as a model preacher.

An oppressive sense of responsibility checked indulgence in mere literary pursuits, yet he found time to keep abreast of the current literature of the day, and watch with deep solicitude the phases of the controversies that were disturbing the Church of Christ. In some he took an active part, in nearly all a deep interest, and if he had lived, this winter would have witnessed his indignant condemnation of the modern attempt to create a church, or reveal a religion, without a creed. He had purposed a series of lectures to remonstrate against this attempt. While holding with an eager grasp the old standards of the evangelical {sic} faith, he grew in catholicity of spirit. His reading had become more liberal, his public services less confined, and his friendships more extended. The subjects of his public lectures and the catholic spirit in which he dealt with them, were proofs of his liberal and extensive reading. His readiness to assist, if practicable, in almost any public service to which he was asked, was evidence of his superiority to sect; and the fact that his friendship extended to every branch of the evangelical church, reveals the completeness of his Christian character.

By the many he was perfectly understood, by the few he was misapprehended. His liberality was regarded as guilty concession; his caution as timidity; his reticence as cowardice. It happened to him as to most, to have some imperfections transformed into vir-

tues, and some infirmities into crimes. His silence never betokened fear. He waited, when others were impatient, for a fitting place and occasion to avow and defend his principles. The crisis of a great controversy never found him recreant to his convictions – whether differing from friend or foe, he defended them. His course furnishes abundant evidence of his faithfulness to truth. Not only was he jealous of its purity, but he was ever anxious to give to each its separate place and distinct mission. He saw that truth needs a careful ministry, and his care was to imitate his Divine Exemplar, by speaking it in the spirit of truth and in season. The doctrines of grace he knew never to be out of place. He always found it fitting to speak of Christ and Him crucified, and the great salvation He proclaimed; but other themes and topics he jealously watched, lest they should lessen the power of the cross.

He firmly believed in the personal reign of Christ; to it his heart referred in hours of depression and disappointment. It came as a solace in weakness and hope in depression. None could doubt his calm expectation of this glorious advent. But to him it was not the glaring meteor to dazzle and affright, but the anticipated break of morning on the mountain tops, to inaugurate a glorious day. This hope, so precious to his heart, was kept in strict subjection to Gospel themes and Christian work. He had seen the force of this expectation over sanguine and impatient minds. He had observed its perilous power over the sentimental, the poetic, and the desponding. Hence of late years the burden of his ministry was especially of Christ and Him crucified, as the sinner's hope; while the saint's expectation of the coming glory was shaded by the surpassing glory of the cross.

The mystery that hung about the {165} character, life, and opinions, of the revered EDWARD IRVING, with our deceased friend's intimate knowledge of his early course and erratic end, tended to deepen the conviction that Gospel themes must be supreme in the pulpit. Mr. Craik's attention had been called anew to this by the graphic portraiture of Irving's character, contained in the recent memoirs written by Mrs. Oliphant. He had watched his course with the ardour and admiration of youth, and witnessed his defection from the truth, and boldness of speculation, with a chastened thoughtfulness and deep regret. All had combined to urge our beloved friend to fill his instructions with the ever-invigorating doctrines of evangelical truth, and leave to the decision of another day the vexed questions of faith and hope.

With all his care, his preaching and teaching were occasionally assailed, but never did his steadfastness fail him. Some years since, he feared that the Church, in vindicating the divinity of our Lord, was tending to undervalue His true humanity. To correct this, he dwelt on the real and essential humanity of Christ. This became for a season a prominent theme in his discourses, and out of it he drew rich consolation and encouragement for his hearers. He illustrated his subject in every suitable form, to arrest the attention and awaken the gratitude and love of the disciple. His published pamphlets gave prominence to the same theme, and many rejoiced to have their thoughts led back again to the man Christ Jesus. The keen eye of censure detected lurking error. It observed the nearness of this glorious truth to a perilous heresy, and sought to condemn our dear friend for passing across the separating line. He was accused of denying the divinity of our Lord. This accusation was supported by the usual sophistry of weakness and malignity. False conclusions were drawn from the admitted statements of the writer, and these conclusions insisted upon as the professed sentiments of Mr. Craik. He resolutely defended his statements and denied the conclusions. His opponents were determined to force their logic on the character of this humble, painstaking and faithful teacher of the truth. The controversy was sharp, and we fear in some instances, unscrupulous. Happily our deceased friend retained his honour, his faith, and his fidelity. It was, however, a sorrowful passage in his ministe-

rial experience. It marred his Christian fellowship, lessened his usefulness, and broke asunder ties that ought to have been indissoluble. It gave the enemy an occasion of gain-saying, and disturbed the fold of Christ. Our brother was valiant in the conflict. He stood firm to the last, and died with the standard of this truth in his hand.

A more recent occasion for speaking found him bold in the defence of truth. The question of the separation of the Church from the State had aroused public attention. Interested parties threw into the controversy elements of strife, personal and irrelevant. It tested the faithfulness of many. Mr. Craik held firmly to the essential spirituality of the kingdom of Christ; and, regarding this cherished principle in danger, he boldly stood forward for its defence. He failed to understand the force of timid counsels. His zeal was offensive to some, but not more than their silence was distressing to him. He had as little conception of being silent when he felt he ought to speak, as of speaking when he ought to be silent. His danger was to delay, not anticipate, the time for strong remonstrance and hearty condemnation. When convinced, silence was impossible.

{166} He had observed, with painful interest, the internal conflicts of the Established Church. Against the *Essays and Reviews* he had done good public service; and the progress of ritualism he had watched with almost consternation. Much of the power of these delusions to captivate and sway the public, he attributed to the fashion, prestige, and resources conveyed to them by the state. This deep conviction compelled his appearance to point out the source whence the mischief sprang. Towards the evangelical clergy and their flocks he cherished the sincerest esteem, and with them the deepest sympathy. He loved the truths they loved, and laboured in the service they prized. His jealousy of their happiness and honour made him the more earnest in his condemnation of their bondage. He from afar saw the coming storm; he watched its intensity, and took part in the strife to moderate its severity.

He saw the evangelical section of the Established Church reduced to a feeble minority, in the presence of a formidable combination of scholarship, genius, wealth, ecclesiasticism, and social position. This alone would not have distressed our brother; but these errors became powers of incalculable mischief, supported by the influence of the state. They obtained factitious and unnatural support. Against these his brethren contended in unequal conflict. He felt they were making a perilous mistake: using a weapon that their enemies could wield with infinitely greater skill and effect. The main influence of these heresies on the public mind came from their connection with the state. They were alien from the English character. The power of the truth came from itself and its God. The contest to be equal must detach the error from its state support. Its inherent weakness would in due time, by the Divine blessing, give to the truth an easy victory. This conviction was resisted by his church friends, and he despaired of triumph till a change of sentiment occurred. How could he then betray this trust?

These words of apology or explanation we feel compelled to record, to protect the memory of our departed friend.

The rise and progress of the Churches of Scotland, with the awakened energy of the Established Church, had been and was, an object of thoughtful attention to our friend. He had studied, and been personally associated with, many of the leaders of each movement, and the fact that so recently his distinguished brother, Dr. Craik, had been Moderator of the Assembly of the Established Church, brought him into intimate fellowship with the distinguished men of both the residuary and free churches. This memoir is too brief to permit a record of his deeply-interesting reminiscences of these events.

In his early life he had passed from the home culture and discipline of an estimable Scotch clergyman to a tutorship in the south of England. The education of home and of

the University of St. Andrews had prepared him to do honour to his new position. He was highly esteemed, and still true to his early devotion to classical studies. An apparently accidental association with Mr. Müller gave young Henry Craik fitting opportunity for the revelation of his power. He became an earnest, acceptable preacher of the Gospel. Adopting the views of the Baptists, his course was in the main prescribed. He did not join the Baptist denomination, but with Mr. Müller came to Bristol, and sought to establish a Christian church. An open and unpaid ministry was the principle {167} on which the attempt rested. They met with many suspicions and much opposition from the religious public. Both these honoured men, with instinctive wisdom, gave themselves mainly to work. The one to become the prince of philanthropists, the other the model student and preacher.

Religious controversy was avoided. Teaching, preaching, and working their preferred service. The small company soon became a formidable following. Generous and liberal helpers unexpectedly sprang up, and from the east the tribe travelled west, until Salem and Bethesda Chapels became the accepted substitute for the name of a sect, and Ashley Down Orphan Asylum the evidence of a noble, beneficent triumph. Faith in the Word was honoured in the chapels: faith in the Work was blessed in the asylum.

Of Mr. Müller we need not write; his monument time has already reared. Those structures of real magnificence, that form the home for nearly 2,000 orphans, both conceal and reveal the nobility and simplicity of his character. His deceased friend claimed no such honour. His devotion was emphatically to the Divine Word. He laboured and watched to catch its very whispers, while his hearers received from his lips the fulness of its counsels, and the wealth of its revelations. Biblical words were to him as caskets; he suspected a jewel in each. He erred sometimes, but not often. The grammatical value, rather than the spiritual force of a passage, would captivate him. The form became more important than the principle it embodied. But these instances were few in contrast with the abounding of fruitful and sober exegeses. We would pass them by, if veneration for his memory did not demand an exact likeness of our friend. With these admissions, we leave Mr. Craik, confessedly, one of the very best commentators that the Holy Scriptures ever had. Through him, for thirty years, their infinite variety and resource have ministered to the guidance and consolation of thousands of hearers.

We would confess our deep regret that he has left behind him commentaries on only one or two portions of the Scriptures. His independent criticisms on Alford, Bishop Ellicott, Tregelles, and Scrivener have been gracefully appreciated by these learned men, and they probably would share the regret that so successful a student and critic had not lived to record his matured judgment in a written commentary on the text. His work, however, is done, and the absence of the teacher should make the student the more solicitous, habitually to be taught of God.*

As if impelled by some premonition of his approaching removal to his better home, he had long indulged the hope of visiting the scenes of his early days. The opportunity came, and he joined his honoured brother's family, sojourning amidst the lake scenery of his native Scotland. To him, more than to many, such companionship, scenery, and associations would yield intense joy. A joy the purer, in that so much of Heaven would be blended with the scenes. But disease brought disappointment, and soon he was compelled almost to hasten back to his home at Clifton. From this there was one continuous descent

* We understand that Dean Alford has already written to secure any fragmentary criticisms that may have been left among his literary remains.

to the grave. A long and painful illness ensued. Loving hearts and medical skill and care joined to stay the hour of departure. He himself had the impression that his {168} work was not yet done. To his honoured brother, with another friend present in this chamber of sanctified affliction, he expressed the wish that he might yet bear the fruits of bygone labours into the earthly storehouse of his great Master. His desire seemed natural. Such stores as he possessed could not, in human seeming, be spared. They were more needful for earth than heaven. But not so was the decree of infinite wisdom and love. By such discipline are we taught that though God puts such treasure in earthen vessels, the vessels are not the treasure. They may be broken, but the riches remain.

The last days of our departed friend were those of suffering and exhaustion. Amidst all, peace reigned. His soul stayed itself on God. There was no exultation, but much tranquility. Neither doubts nor distrust disturbed his last moments. All was peace. Once he said, as we were standing by his bedside, "God's presence is precious; I feel its value; it is my stay, my hope: but it is good to have about me and in my chamber those I love. I feel how merciful and kind it is of my heavenly Father to give us these objects of human affection and sympathy. I like their presence; they help and cheer me." His beloved wife and dear daughter were moving about his tender heart, and soothing its sorrows, and assuaging its pains. They were ministering to his peace. And thus in them his keen eye of faith and love saw his Lord. They to him were gracious and needed gifts from His hand.

On another occasion, his almost supernatural vivacity and power surprised us. For nearly two hours he sustained a conversation on the subjects on which he had so often dwelt. His esteem for scholarly men was retained to the last. He seemed to regard them as sentinels, appointed by his Master to protect the precious seed of the Word of God. No presence would to him have been more appropriate in dying moments, than those honoured servants of the Word; and now he refers to them with genuine admiration and loving sympathy.

He portrayed the character and work of his former and present coadjutors in the Non-conformist ministry, as if desirous to leave behind a friendly sketch of those whom he so much honoured. Of his own labours he spoke with hope, and of his aptitude to teach with gratitude. He felt his weakness, but clearly knew his strength. It was not surprising that he was willing to stay in the strife a little longer, if returning strength should help him to reveal, through the Divine Spirit, the hidden power and treasures of scriptural truth. This interview presented the last opportunity of talking on such subjects. Disease and langour {sic} increased. The poor body became a feeble frame, from which the spirit could apparently take easy flight. But there was yet delay.

The parting words addressed to us when passing round his bed of langour and pain were, "Dear M—, when you hear it is all over, give God thanks." These words followed us. They enjoined a duty we knew to be well nigh impossible to obey. It would require great resignation and faith to praise God for taking away such a man and such a life as Henry Craik's. But we have learned already that often an apparent loss is a great gain. To him this must be, and to us it may be true. We may then calmly say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." It is all over; let us give God thanks.

His remains were carried to the {169} grave on Tuesday, amidst the sorrows and regrets of thousands. Whether by design we know not, but with marked propriety, the Cathedral bell was tolling as the funeral passed through College Green; and in Bath Street the shops and offices of the Jewish merchants and traders were partially closed. We have since heard that this was a voluntary tribute of respect. The day was gloomy; the very heavens seemed to sympathise with the sorrowing crowd. A long line of carriages and mourners

followed the remains to the cemetery, and there thousands were waiting the interment. Among them were nearly all the Baptist and Independent ministers in the city. A clergyman, Mr. Doudney, was present. Two brethren officiated, and gave utterance to the sympathy and sorrow that prevailed. All was genuine. Each seemed to be bearing a heavy burthen. It was felt to be a time to mourn and weep. A master in Israel had fallen; but the sorrow was not as those without hope, for all felt "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

Bristol has lost many citizens and benefactors during these last twenty years: the broken columns and massive monuments of our cemetery tell of losses that no language can express. But of all, none surpasses that which has been sustained by the church and the world by the death of Henry Craik. Neither mural tablet nor marble monument is needed to perpetuate his name. A multitude now, and many hereafter, will trace their likeness to Christ to his ministration. It will be increasingly seen how largely the Divine Spirit used him to awaken to life and mould into spiritual beauty the new creature in Christ Jesus. And in the impress of the Lord stamped on the new character, shall be traced the faithful work of the under-servant who laboured for such a joy and such a reward. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

This memoir has been composed in haste. To prepare such a notice before the decease of our friend, appeared irreverent. Afterwards it was announced that a more suitable testimony would soon be published. The inevitable delay seemed to call for some loving hand to give to his weeping friends help in remembering him. This is now done; but without the time and opportunity a suitable memorial demands. The reader must accept it as the writer's imperfect expression of love and admiration for a friend of surpassing worth. If affection has set the portrait in a frame too bright, it is the heart that has done it. We have striven to be faithful. We have conferred with no friends. We alone are responsible for the opinions expressed. After years of great intimacy, we have gathered the impressions here transferred. If we have erred in judgment, or unwittingly written what may grieve a friend, it will be the occasion of sincere regret.

Let us breathe the prayer that we may follow in his steps, so that "to live may be Christ, to die gain."

Redland, February, 1866.