A MEMOIR OF GEORGE NEWPORT

John J Newport

March 2021

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1837 – 1906

by John James Newport, his son

PREFACE

This memoir of George Newport was produced by his son, John James Newport, author of An Illustrated Historical and Descriptive Account of Hooe Church, Sussex.

It was lodged, by George's great granddaughter, Kathy French, from USA, with John William Newport, George's great grandson, as he was the Newport Family historian. John William was also the producer of the book, The Hooe Memorials, And the men who gave their lives.

Sadly, John William passed away in June 2020 before he was able to transcribe the booklet and distribute it to George's ancestors.

I have now been able to do this, as a tribute to my husband, John William Newport, and to pass copies on to family members.

I think it is a fascinating booklet and I do hope you will find it so also.

M.L.N. March 2021

FROM GRACE TO GLORY

A MEMOIR OF GEORGE NEWPORT, a LOWLY

But LOYAL SERVANT of Christ

By

HIS SON JOHN

PREFACE

The following Memoir is written to set forth the Grace of the Lord Christ Jesus, to warn believers against backsliding, to encourage backsliders to return to their Savoir, to illustrate the blessedness of life lived in the service of the Christ, and the great spiritual benefit to oneself and to others in meeting around the Word of God.

FROM GRACE TO GLORY

My father was born February 17th, 1837 at Ridley House, Herne, Kent. This house – named after, and reputed to have been once the residence of Bishop Ridley when Vicar of Herne – has since been demolished, and another built bearing the name.

That he had lived under the same roof as Bishop Ridley seems to have stimulated him to follow so noble an example of loyalty to Christ even unto death.

His parents were a quiet Godly couple attached to their parish church, and anxious to train their offspring in the fear of the Lord. The father was a well built, rather tall man, firm, but good-hearted, intelligent and possessing very much and varied practical knowledge. He was much respected by all who knew him. His partner in life was a slim, active woman who made others' comfort her deep concern. She would bustle about, apologising for divers fancied defects in her arrangements as she welcomed any visitors, and tried to make them feel at home.

To his wayward boys the father was stern enough – not sparing the strap across their bare backs; after sending them to bed; but the mother shed tears over them, pleaded with and prayed for them.

The children attended the parish church Sunday School, where the rule was for the older scholars to repeat each Sunday the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for the day. For Scripture my father had an excellent memory and was able to recite more than any other at the time. But it is curious that the 'prayer' he was taught was that appeal to the writers of the Gospels which begins:

"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on."

My father was made aware of the false teaching underlying such a petition by a relative of his who was a schoolmaster. This worthy

evidently knew the truth as it is in Jesus, and enlightened him very much in spiritual things.

As a boy my father was a daring athlete. He could run, lift, or jump better than his mates. This trait in his character was illustrated in manhood, and seems to have influenced his moral life – making him unflinchingly to warn or exhort persons in higher stations of life than himself, even some of the nobility.

An account of his confirmation shall be given here in his own words written in a letter to his grand-daughters Irene and Ethel, previous to their confirmation on June 2nd, 1906.

"My dear Grand-daughters,

"I am thinking about you, and I do think a lot about you too. You are about to be confirmed. I am very pleased to hear it, and it makes me think of when I was a boy. I have never forgotten the prayer the man of God said over me, asking God to defend me and to give me the Grace of His Holy Spirit – Archbishop Sumner, about the 1849. That's a long time ago; and my prayer my mother taught me you will find for the 2nd Sunday in Lent. And I have thought it was good for me since, although I did not understand much about it; but I think your great grandma did. I understand it now, and now I can see her by faith, and perhaps she knows I am writing about her.

"My aunt told me to 'commit my ways unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass.' I have found their advice has been good for me. I have not been blessed with this world's goods, but I have had great spiritual blessings, which make me very grateful; and I want you to be very watchful – 'Quit you like men, Be strong.' In other words: 'Be strong in the Lord' – strong in faith, putting on the whole armour. Go forth. Fight the good fight of faith. By having the sword of the spirit ye shall be able to overcome all the fiery darts of the enemy. The Lord is a shield and buckler to all who put their trust in Him. Be of good courage, for He has said He will never leave nor forsake them that trust in Him. You can believe me, for I have proved His faithfulness. He wants more love from me, and I want more grace to

do so; and I will ask Him to love and bless you and all who take part with you in your gathering together. And then follows the blessed privilege of being partakers with the saints – those present and those that are gone before and those that shall follow till He comes again – when you shall see Jesus face to face, and shall be like Him. Of what a blessed hope! – something to look for! – something to work for! Count all things but loss for to win the crown that you shall wear if you prove faithful. He will prove faithful too, and will give you all He has promised. I should, and so would Grandma, like to be with you on Sunday next; but we cannot – we shall have to be at our Church. But we shall see you in our minds' eye. Our prayers for you will be in the church militant, that is, for all God's people everywhere.

"Now, dear grand-daughters, I commend you to our Heavenly Father's care and keeping. May he bless you with all spiritual blessings that you may walk worthy before Him in love and be a blessing in the kingdom of His Grace in bringing poor sinners to be saved from sin and misery, and brought into fellowship with Jesus Christ to be their Saviour and their Friend too."

After holding several situations in Herne Bay, Canterbury and Whitstable, until about sixteen years of age, my father went to London through the offer of a visitor to Herne Bay to give him employment there. Some months after he fell ill with brain fever and was sent back to his parents. His life was despaired of, and his father was advised by the doctor to get a coffin made ready for the burial. This advice was acted upon. But the sickness was not unto death, and the coffin – after being in the house sometime – was broken up.

Recovering, he returned to London, and joined Mr. Weatherley's Bible Class in Grafton Street, Tottenham Court Road.

His first visit was with the intention of upsetting the meeting; the next was his time of decision for Christ.

He referred to this period of his life in a letter dated February 3rd, 1906, and given [later on in this booklet].

As is the case with so many young believers, his new found joy led him to write to his parents, other relatives, and acquaintances, inquiring after their souls' welfare, and imploring them to yield to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

His letters and subsequent visits brought about a time of revival in his native place, bringing spiritual blessing to the villagers, and establishing himself in the faith and service of Christ.

The members of the Bible Class to him were "brothers," and as a brother he gave them of his means – such as they were.

In his zeal for Christ he visited lodging houses and workhouses in St. Giles' district, Bloomsbury, and distributed tracts he obtained from the Religious Tract Society.

With regret, he found his first attempt to speak at the Bible Class was so unpleasantly received he was deterred from making a second; and the conduct of some of the members towards him determined him to leave the class. This proved a step in the wrong direction – to his own hurt, and spiritual loss.

Becoming a backslider, his health gave way. He was advised by a medical man to turn from reading and thinking about religious subjects to seek benefit in pleasures, theatre-going and marriage. He joined worldly company and married. His wife, Rebecca, gave birth to a son, named John, and died five days after; and the babe died in less than seven months. Their deaths were a heavy blow to him, and led him back in deep contrition to the Saviour. Any mention of the deceased was always painful to him; and not until a short time before his death did he tell the writer about the circumstances of that union that was unblessed because it was not "in the Lord."

His second marriage was prayerfully considered before being entered upon. His bride and he both regularly attended the evangelical ministry at Hanover Church, Regent Street (now removed). Both were Christian workers.

The birth of the first child of this union was a period of heart-searching, humble confession and prayer. He once told how with his Bible open before him, in fear and trembling, he waited to see whether the Lord would be gracious to him or not.

Recognising in a son the mercy of God, he called him John – "Jehovah is gracious."

My father was one among the many thousand persons (including the writer) who were blessed when "showers of blessing" accompanied the work of Messrs. Moody and Sankey, and others.

About the year 1877 my parents removed to South Hampstead and attended the faithful ministry of the late Rev. H. Sharpe at the Iron Church which stood at the south end of the footpath now Fitzjohn's Avenue. The late Bishop of Exeter, Bishop Bickersteth, when Vicar of Christ Church, Hampstead, also influenced my father.

The church teaching he received in his earlier days made my father so strongly attached to the Church of England that he regarded it as a sin to enter any Nonconformist place of worship. He held, too, strong views on the efficacy of the Sacraments.

In after years his views were modified. Under the teaching of the Rev. W. Sears, pastor of the Baptist Church, Willesden Green, he was so led to think of adult baptism by immersion that he almost submitted to being re-baptised.

The writer remembers well an occasion in his boyhood when he had been guilty of lying that his father called upon him and his brother to kneel down while he prayed. This method of dealing with his son's offence was effective and its result lasting.
After leaving South Hampstead various removals were made until residence was taken up in West Hampstead at the same time that the Rev. W. J. Watkins came into what is now the parish of St. Cuthbert's. This period of his sojourning was the beginning of a career of Christian activity and bold, earnest, aggressive service for Christ to bring souls into His Kingdom.

The evangelical fervour of the Vicar appealed to him so greatly that he invited others to hear him; and when the church was to be built he secured many donations even from Roman Catholics, Jews and others, who never expected to enter it.

In 1888 both my parents were very ill. My father's ailment – rheumatism – was regarded as chronic. Their recovery was very remarkable, if not miraculous.

Of this period of great trial my father always spoke with deep gratitude. He found in sickness he was drawn to the Saviour, and found Him then indeed a "very present help."

Subsequently, he joined the Men's Bible Class which met in the Mission Room.

There was self denial in giving up his Sunday afternoon's nap; but he was rewarded with spiritual good which he much valued.

The following extract from a letter written in 1898 shows his humility and sense of God's mercy:

"I was sixty-one last Thursday, and it was a great day of humbling myself before Him. I had nothing to boast of. Many times have I failed! – many times He showed me mercy. Sixty-one years! – if I had always worn my garments spotless where should I have been now? If I had always walked worthy of a Wonderful Counsellor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace, I should by this time have wrought righteousness, subdued kingdoms, plucked firebrands from the fire. But I am washed. The blood has been shed, and now the covenant is made and accepted. He is mine, and I am His – and He is mine for ever."

With the aid of Thornton's manual he began the practice of family prayer on Sunday evenings. He found, however, that even so excellent a work did not sufficiently meet his needs. Consequently, with fear and trembling at first, he offered extempore prayer. In time he had

such freedom and fulness, it became a tax upon physical endurance to remain kneeling.

At the Friday evening public prayer meeting his voice was generally heard petitioning the Lord's blessing on His work.

The Sunday morning prayer meetings at quarter past eight had in him a warm advocate. Of them he wrote in June 1898:

"It is very nice to meet early in the morning, and then you realise the happiness of the day. You are well rewarded for it; for it is the first fruits unto God for the mercies of the past week; and He will honour and bless you because you commit yourself into His loving hands."

The prayer meetings before the Mission Hall services he always tried to attend as a preparation for blessings on the work.

In April 1893 he entered upon Christian work in St. Cuthbert's as a district visitor. He undertook to fill as much as he could the vacancy in the worker's ranks caused by the writer leaving London.

This led him to visiting several houses in the parish, distributing magazines and chatting with the people. In this he found the promise fulfilled: "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Writing of none staying after some special services in 1898, he wrote:-

"Oh that I had power to unfold to them my experience! then they would not put it off! I know there are trials to bear; but, as regards our reconciliation, there is peace in my heart now that I would not give for the husks again. I am only sorry my peace was not made years before. I must confess it: that I was numbered as a transgressor, and what am I now but a debtor to His mercy and love?"

When the new Hall in Maygrove Road was built he entered more fully into the work of bringing souls to Christ. Various prejudices he once held against special services and some methods employed in them

were broken down as he fully dedicated himself to the Master, yielded himself to the Spirit, and realised the needs of the work.

Not on Sundays alone, however, was he engaged for the Master. He knew no "off duty" from His service. Home and street, train and 'bus, workshop and park, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, early and late, in town or country, well or ill, fresh or tired, with rich or poor, he was ready to plead, counsel, or warn for Him who loved him so. Not only did he speak for Christ, but he also gave food and clothes, money and labour, books and prayers. How many have profited by him no man can tell. For self he had no thought; he lived for Christ, and for those for whom Christ lives.

The following extract from a letter tells of one case of Christian service in the country:

"I have had one of the greatest joys of my life …….. the four servants in the house were longing to have conversation with me about their souls …….. The Holy Spirit was there. True, it was realised that "whosoever drinketh of this water it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The flow ran even to those that were outside on the estate."

With a blessed satisfaction my father was able to return to the Bible Class of his younger days by joining the "Old Graftonians."

The Hon. Secretary, Mr. Walter, thus wrote of him after his decease: "We know he was always ready – ready not because of any merit of his own but through the abundant grace of God in Christ Jesus. We were always pleased to hear his testimony."
And so he was. His untiring labours of mind and body, his cares and circumstances told upon his frame; and, worn out, on November 7th, 1906, he passed to his eternal rest - to be "with Christ", which is very far better."

How prophetic were his words in a letter of February 3rd, 1906. He wrote:-

"Dear Son and Daughter and Grand-children,

"A happy new month to you all. This is the beginning of the first year of my life. Craving, and procrastinating, self-willed, stubborn, wanting freedom, by the goodness of my Heavenly Father I obtained this freedom. Lovingly and tenderly I was brought up. And in a few years, this freedom entangled me so much among the mixed multitude and this freedom soon brought me into bondage.

"Carelessness and indifference soon caused my heart to wander and then to go astray. Year by year went on. A Friend called me. I did not want Him. He called on me again and again, till at last I had to listen to the warnings He gave. Sad …. Sad! Oh, the gross darkness that covered my soul – thick darkness! I felt a stranger, a sojourner, an outcast, without hope, afar off. Yet to Him Who sees, the darkness and light are both alike. He called again, led me in a path by a way I knew not – a new way where truth was expounded, where a group of His jewels He had gathered together. There was my Friend in the midst of them and blessing them, and they knew He was there. But I did not; for I laughed and made game of them. My Friend must have been sad when He saw this! But of how He must have loved me! He took my hand again a week after, and there that night I was to know my Friend Who had an interest in me. There was then sorrow for what wrong I had done, sorrow for what I had not done that I should have done. At last I was conquered! – gave myself to my Friend many years. Ah, that is good! Let us learn this lesson:- Perfect peace: the reward of perfect trust: this is that rest: sleep in Jesus."

The last day he was able to do so, he sang repeatedly the refrain of a hymn in the "Christian Choir."

"I shall know Him by the print of the nails in His hands."

With humble thanks to our Heavenly Father for His unfailing mercy and love to our beloved one we laid his "tent" to rest in West Hampstead Cemetery on Saturday, November 10th, 1906.

‘Twas Thomas in the upper room
Who sought and saw a proof complete
His Lord had triumphed o’er the tomb
And could – indeed be seen by His.
‘Twas he who at the Master’s word
Beheld and knew the prints that marked
Where nails had pierced His loving hands.
And – as he gazed upon that Form
Raised up immortal and Divine –
Exclaimed with rapture and delight:
“My Lord and my God!”

So, in the upper room of heaven,
We too may know Him by those prints
Which tell His love Who died for us.
Worship Him too our Lord and God.

J.J.N.

13th November, 1906

A few further notes

I thought it might be useful to add a few additional notes here to make some parts a little clearer. I think it is something John William might have wished – although you can, of course, view it all on his website.

George's first wife, who he stated was Rebecca, was a Rebecca Moss (1840-1863), and the baby who died was George John.

George's second wife was Matilda Martha Natt (1843-1931) and they had six children – John James, William, Emily, Robert Henry, Matilda Martha Sarah, and Ernest Edward – Ernest was born in 1881 and died in 1882.

Matilda Martha was a very active woman and loved keeping fit. Apparently, she lived for some time at Caritas Villa in Hooe, and, as she loved skipping to keep fit, became known as 'the skipping granny'.

John James' copy of his book on his father was not included in the archival paperwork given to John William, but the copy this transcription was made from was the one John James obviously gave to his brother, William, who had emigrated to America. As stated in my Preface this was kindly given to John William by Kathy French, William's granddaughter.

George's parents were John Newport (we always called him John the Gardener) (1809-1882) and Sarah Spicer (1806-1880).

M.L.N.