

# **George Muller Sermons**

## **Chapter 3 - An Address from the Life & Diary of Henry Craik**

An Address printed as an Introduction to the volume entitled Passages from the Diary and Letters of Henry Craik.

It was in July, 1829, that I first became acquainted with Mr. Craik. That which drew me to him was not that we both were then nearly twenty-four years of age; nor was it that we both had had a university education; nor was it that we both, with great love and earnestness, at that time, pursued the study of the Hebrew language; nor was it even, that both of us had been about the same time brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, whilst at the university; but it will be seen in what follows, what it was that drew me to him. In May, 1829, soon after my arrival in England, I was taken very ill. My desire was then very strong to depart, that I might be with my adorable Lord who had loved me and given Himself for me, the great sinner. It pleased God, however, contrary to my expectation, and especially contrary to my desire, to begin to restore me; and, in order to complete my restoration, I was medically advised to leave London for change of air. In submission to the will of God. I went to Teignmouth; for though the state of heart in which I was, desired no prolongation of life, yet I considered it my duty to use this means. While at Teignmouth, I became acquainted with Mr. Craik, and his warmth of heart towards the Lord drew me to him. It was this which was the attraction to me.

As I stayed but a few weeks at Teignmouth, I saw but little, comparatively, of him; but in January, 1830, I returned to Teignmouth, and thenceforth abode there. We were now drawn more fully together; for between July, 1829, and January, 1830, I had seen the leading truths connected with the second coming of our Lord Jesus; I had apprehended the all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as our rule, and the Holy Spirit as our teacher; I had seen clearly the precious doctrines of the grace of God, about which I had been uninstructed for nearly four years after my conversion; and I had learned the heavenly calling of the Church of Christ, and the consequent position of the believer in this world. As these very truths so greatly occupied the heart of Mr. Craik also, we were now soon drawn closely together; and from that time to the day of his falling asleep in Jesus, our friendship was intimate and unbroken for thirty-six years.

The reader will learn from the memoir itself that we remained labouring in the Word in the same locality in Devon shire for about two years and three months; and then, in a very marked way, were both led, at the same time, to Bristol, where we have laboured together for more than thirty-three years.

It has been often observed how remarkable it was that we should have laboured for so many years, so harmoniously together, and that this should have continued up to the last. Now, as I write this introduction for the profit of the reader, I dwell a little on this point. It was not because Mr. Craik had no mind of his own, and therefore submitted himself habitually to my judgment; nor was it because I blindly followed him, having no judgment of my own. All our Christian friends who were acquainted with us knew well that this was not at all the case; but the reasons were these, When in the year 1832 I saw how some preferred my beloved friend's ministry to my own, I determined, in the strength of God, to rejoice in this, instead of envying him. I said, with John the Baptist, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven" (John iii. 27). This resisting the devil hindered separation of heart. But this was not all. God honoured me also from that time in the ministry of the Word, and greatly, which is only referred to, to show how a double blessing followed my resisting the devil. But when it pleased the Lord, from the beginning of 1839, and thenceforth, to condescend to bestow such abundant honour upon me as He did in connection with the Orphan Houses and the other objects of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad, the temptation was the other way, especially when this work was more and more extended, and the blessing of God resting thereon became greater and greater. Then my beloved friend, on his part, speaking after the manner of men, had cause for envy. But how was it in reality? There were few, if any, who are more truly rejoiced in all the honour which the Lord condescended to put on me than my friend did.

Still this was not all. There is this particularly to be added, that whatever the spiritual infirmities of my friend or of myself were, there was given to us, throughout the whole thirty-six years of our friendship, an honest purpose to live to God, and not to ourselves; to please Him, and not ourselves; and thus it came that our friendship remained unbroken to the end, though the temptations for alienation of heart, humanly speaking, increased more and more, instead of decreasing. Our natural constitution of mind and temperament were very different, and yet we had to work together; whilst about 2500 believers were received into fellowship since first we came to Bristol; and whilst of late years, nearly 1000 believers were in fellowship in the Church meeting at Bethesda and Salem chapels,

among whom we laboured. Who therefore can doubt the difficulty there was constantly in the way to this continuation of love and union? but there was help to be found in God, and we found it to the end. Our parting was thus, when I saw my dear friend for the last time. After I had kissed him, when I purposed to go, he, being too weak to converse any more, said, "Sit down," and also asked Mrs. Craik to sit down, that he might look on us, though he could not converse. I sat thus silently still awhile, and then left. This was our last interview. The next day I took cold, and was for several days kept at home, during which time my dear friend fell asleep.

The reader will see from the memoir that Mr. Craik had very superior powers of mind; but that which made him especially lovely in my estimation, were the following features of his character and spiritual attainments:

I. He was very affectionate.

II. Like Nathanael of old, he was truly without guile.

III. He was particularly conscientious. Whatever his weakness or failing in any way, you might be sure that he acted conscientiously. He did what he did, because he thought it right. Our views concerning certain modes of action differed materially, but I always came back to this: My friend is conscientious; if he only saw as I did, he would surely act differently.

IV. Whilst endowed by God with such great mental powers, he did not use them to get a name among men, nor to be admired by men, but to throw light on the Holy Scriptures, and to set forth the truth. As a striking proof of his humility, and his being far from seeking the honour of men, I mention the following:

In the year 1849, Professor Alexander intimated to him, in the name of the University of St. Andrew's, that it was intended to confer on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, or of Doctor of Canon and Civil Law. He courteously declined this honour, but recommended a Christian gentleman who had laboured much in biblical literature for the degree, as it might be of great use to him as an author. The latter was done, and this gentleman had bestowed on him the degree of LL.D. Some years since, the same university repeated to Mr. Craik their former intimation and desire, and a second time my friend humbly declined the honour. Truly this is a striking proof that whatever momentary failings there might have been to the contrary, he was steadfastly purposed in his heart not to seek the honour that comes from man, but to commend himself to God as His servant.

V. Mr. Craik manifested great sympathy to those who were in trial and affliction. His affectionate heart felt deeply for the sufferings of others.

VI. Mr. Craik was eminently a man of prayer, and a man given to the study of the Word of God. Such prayerfulness regarding the Holy Scriptures, such truly digging into the Word as for hid treasures, such meditation over the Word as he was given to, I never knew surpassed by any servant of Christ. The chief loss that the Church of Christ at large has sustained in his removal, is not merely that he was a lovely, amiable, truly spiritually minded Christian to all who intimately knew him, and an earnest, devoted preacher of the Lord Jesus; but one who had truly studied on his knees, with great diligence, the oracles of God. Among all the thousands of believers whom I know, there is none whose judgment on any part of truth I should have more esteemed than that of my departed friend, on account of his great caution, his prayerfulness, his diligence in comparing Scripture with Scripture, his humility of soul, his very considerable amount of knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and his habitual reading the Scriptures in their original languages.

In reference to the health of Mr. Craik, as one who knew him so intimately and so long, I have to state that when he was about forty-four years old, he looked far healthier than when I first knew him at twenty-four years of age, and this was still more the case when he was about fifty years old. He was never strong, and, like many men of great mind, he was, not sufficiently careful to make the best of the health and strength he had. He would eat generally rapidly, and though suffering from weak digestion, neglect proper mastication of his food. Moreover, when he felt pretty well, he would forget his constitutional weakness, and labour mentally beyond his strength. This is not stated to throw any blame on that excellent man who is no more among us, but his friend states it as a warning to his fellow-believers; for life, health, strength of body or mind are entrusted to us as precious talents to be used for God. This want of habitually acting with caution respecting his health, and overtaxing his mind, produced, no doubt, at certain times, a measure of nervous depression, of which the reader will find intimations in his diary, which makes Mr. Craik almost appear to be another man than what he was known to be in his ordinary public life, in which he generally manifested great cheerfulness.

Having referred to his health, I cannot help adding that it is my full conviction that the constitutional weakness of my friend was intended by God for an especial blessing to him. Though Mr. Craik was a very humble man, and though it was his earnest and habitual desire to use his mental powers for the glory of God; yet no one could intimately know him without being aware that his natural tendency was to aim after the cultivation of his mind with too great an earnestness and natural fondness, which, but for his weak constitution, might have become a great snare to his inner man. As a check, therefore, the

Lord so mercifully gave to him this powerful mind in conjunction with a weak body, that he might not overmuch indulge in the cultivation of his mental powers.

I add further this with regard to his health. I never knew any one who constitutionally so shrank from suffering as he did. He often spoke to me on this subject. And yet this very individual was, for nearly seven months before his decease, not only a very great sufferer, but was also greatly sustained under his great sufferings. On Christmas-day, 1865, sitting a longer time than usual at his bedside, because I had more time than generally, all at once I remembered what he had so often spoken to me about, and then told him, that now the strength of the Lord was manifested in his constitutional shrinking from pain and suffering. He saw it and owned it. And verily the Lord greatly sustained His suffering servant, and did so to the end. Without complaining, he passed through his sufferings, though praying and longing to be delivered out of them. And at last he was delivered. Peacefully leaning upon Jesus, he fell asleep.

His poor friend who writes this, remains. As yet the Lord allows me to serve Him on earth. Pray, Christian reader, that whether this time be long or short, I may be enabled to spend it truly to the honour of God.

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