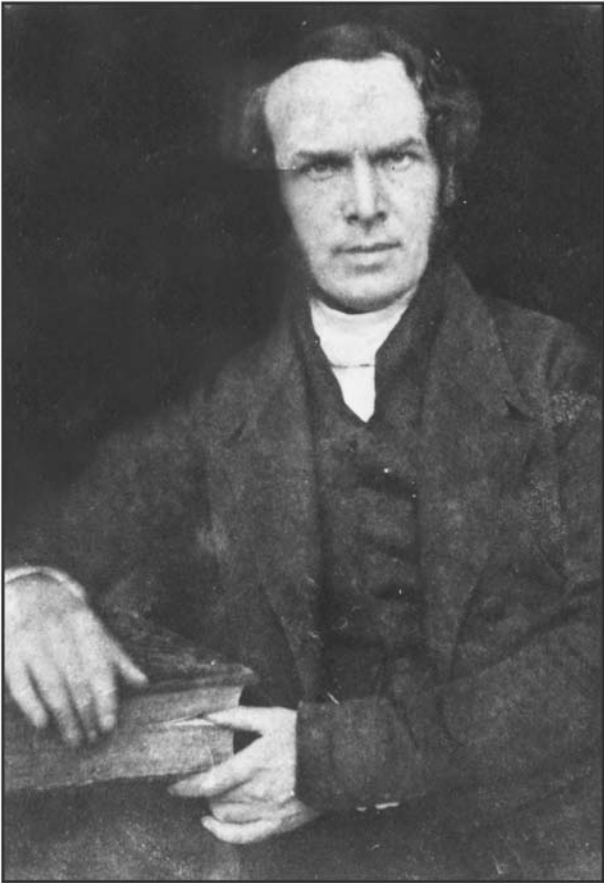


Arctius Bonae



A young Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

(David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, Scottish National
Photography Collection, Scottish National Portrait Gallery)

“Christ Is All”:

The Piety of Horatius Bonar

Introduced by
Michael A. G. Haykin

Edited by
Michael A. G. Haykin
and
Darrin R. Brooker



Reformation Heritage Books
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To Iain H. Murray,
with thanks to the Triune God
for his ministry
and that of the Banner of Truth Trust

and

To Melissa,
with love

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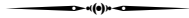
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Profiles in Reformed Spirituality



Charles Dickens' famous line in *A Tale of Two Cities*—"it was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—seems well suited to western Evangelicalism since the 1960s. On the one hand, these decades have seen much for which to praise God and to rejoice. In His goodness and grace, for instance, Reformed truth is no longer a house under siege. Growing numbers identify themselves theologically with what we hold to be biblical truth, namely, Reformed theology and piety. And yet, as an increasing number of Reformed authors have noted, there are many sectors of the surrounding western Evangelicalism that are characterized by great shallowness and a trivialization of the weighty things of God. So much of Evangelical worship seems barren. And when it comes to spirituality, there is little evidence of the riches of our heritage as Reformed Evangelicals.

As it was at the time of the Reformation, when the watchword was *ad fontes*—"back to the sources"—so it is now: the way forward is backward. We need to go back to the spiritual heritage of Reformed Evangelicalism to find the pathway forward. We cannot live in the past; to attempt to do so would be antiquarianism. But our Reformed forebearers in the faith

can teach us much about Christianity, its doctrines, its passions, and its fruit.

And they can serve as our role models. As R. C. Sproul has noted of such giants as Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards: “These men all were conquered, overwhelmed, and spiritually intoxicated by their vision of the holiness of God. Their minds and imaginations were captured by the majesty of God the Father. Each of them possessed a profound affection for the sweetness and excellence of Christ. There was in each of them a singular and unswerving loyalty to Christ that spoke of a citizenship in heaven that was always more precious to them than the applause of men.”¹

To be sure, we would not dream of placing these men and their writings alongside the Word of God. John Jewel (1522–1571), the Anglican apologist, once stated: “What say we of the fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyprian?... They were learned men, and learned fathers; the instruments of the mercy of God, and vessels full of grace. We despise them not, we read them, we reverence them, and give thanks unto God for them. Yet...we may not make them the foundation and warrant of our conscience: we may not put our trust in them. Our trust is in the name of the Lord.”²

Seeking then both to honor the past and yet not idolize it, we are issuing these books in the series

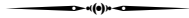
1. “An Invaluable Heritage,” *Tabletalk*, 23, no. 10 (October 1999): 5–6.

2. Cited in Barrington R. White, “Why Bother with History?” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 4, no. 2 (July 1969): 85.

Profiles in Reformed Spirituality. The design is to introduce the spirituality and piety of the Reformed tradition by presenting descriptions of the lives of notable Christians with select passages from their works. This combination of biographical sketches and collected portions from primary sources gives a taste of the subjects' contributions to our spiritual heritage and some direction as to how the reader can find further edification through their works. It is the hope of the publishers that this series will provide riches for those areas where we are poor and light of day where we are stumbling in the deepening twilight.

—Joel R. Beeke
Michael A. G. Haykin

Acknowledgements



Darrin R. Brooker:

It has long been my desire that more of the writings of Horatius Bonar be made available to a generation that may only recognize his name from several selections in their hymnals. The richness of Bonar's life and writings go far beyond the hymns he is most remembered for. My sincerest thanks to Michael Haykin for asking me to be involved in putting together this work. I hope the selections that follow show well the heart of the man who wanted nothing more than to see God's people edified through his labors.

This book is really an extension of *The Life and Works of Horatius Bonar CD* that was completed in 2004, and I would be remiss if I did not thank those who were crucial in helping me to bring that project together: Mr. Ed Skedd of St. Catherine's Argyle Church in Edinburgh (once Chalmers Memorial where Bonar pastored) who allowed me to sift through some of Bonar's original manuscripts and who has graciously answered my every request for pictures and information. I must also thank Bill Noonkesser, who provided me with several finished works, and my brother, Darrell Brooker, who helped in the tedious task of scanning many pages of text

and encouraged me to plod on when I lost the desire to continue. Thanks are due also to Derek Traynor, who provided the photograph of the marble carving of Bonar for the front cover.

But it is to my wife Melissa that I owe my deepest gratitude, for it was she who gave up countless hours with her husband while I collected, scanned, and edited the works of Bonar. While not visible to the eye, her mark is there on every page.

The Lord is indeed gracious, and it is my hope that He blesses this work. I pray that it will not only help to paint a clearer picture of the life of this godly man, but, more important, that it will point past Bonar towards the Savior he loved with both heart and mind, and that it will impassion us to do likewise.

Michael A. G. Haykin:

I must confess that, like D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, I have been far more interested in the eighteenth-century church than the church of the following era, the Victorian period. I suspect that the revivals that shaped the eighteenth-century church have had much to do with this preference. But there were also certain changes that came into the theology and worship of the church in the nineteenth century that ultimately proved detrimental to her witness and were off-putting to me.

Of course, I was familiar with C. H. Spurgeon, but I wrongly imagined him to be a somewhat isolated figure. In the late 1990s and subsequently, I have learned how wrong I was. There were men of stout and Puritan-like faith such as James P. Boyce and

Basil Manly, Jr., in the southern United States, and Asahel Nettleton, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield in the northern States. In Great Britain, there was J. C. Ryle and the subject of this volume: Horatius Bonar (and, of course, his brother, Andrew Bonar, and his friends, especially Robert Murray McCheyne). It has been a journey of discovery to edit this book with a dear friend, Darrin Brooker, and I thank God for our friendship and the grace that has made this book possible. Like Darrin, I am convinced that Bonar's words are as needed today as when they were first written in that very different world of Victorian Britain.

I also wish to thank Dr. Joel Beeke for including this volume in the series Profiles in Reformed Spirituality, and Jay Collier for his great help in the editing process. Thanks are due also to Martha Fisher (copy editing), Linda den Hollander (typesetting), and Amy Zevenbergen (cover design).

I am also thankful for the help of my assistant, Allen Mickle, Jr., whose role as my assistant formally ends this month when I leave my post as Principal of Toronto Baptist Seminary and begin teaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. What a joy to have friends with whom to labor in the work of the kingdom. More than ever, I know that my work as an historian for the church would be impossible without the kind and selfless collaboration of such men.

In that regard, I also want to thank the man to whom I have dedicated my portion of this book, Iain H. Murray, for the numerous kindnesses and encouragements he has given me over the past twenty years. By the grace of Almighty God, the books that he has

written or that he has edited for the Banner of Truth have played a key role in shaping me into the Christian historian that I am. May the Lord be praised!

Dundas, Ontario
December 2, 2007

Note of interest: the emblems used at the end of most selections are communion tokens from two of Bonar’s congregations, which were used as means of accountability and preparation for the Lord’s supper.



He adorned all he touched.

— Alexander Whyte

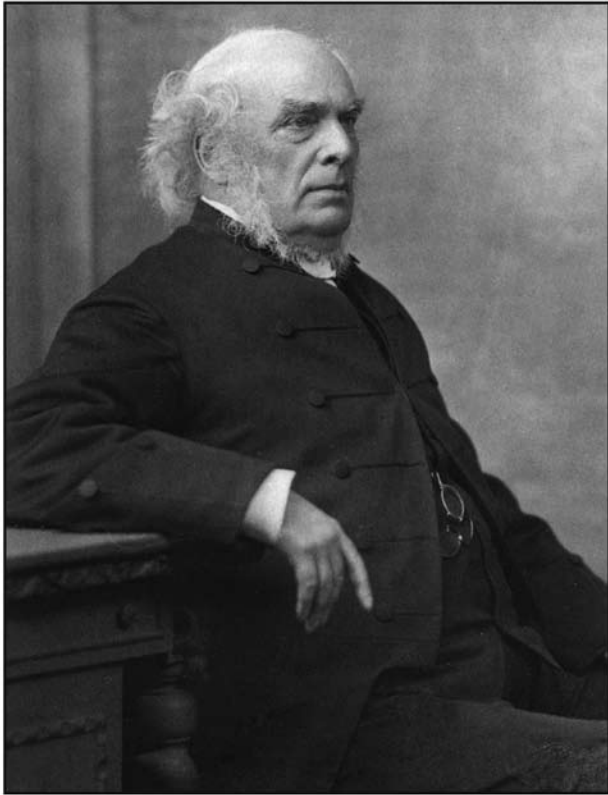
Righteousness without works to the sinner, simply on his acceptance of the Divine message concerning Jesus and His sufficiency—this has been the burden of our good news.... It is one message, one gospel, one cross, one sacrifice, from which nothing can be taken and to which nothing can be added. This is the...beginning and the ending of our ministry.

— Horatius Bonar, “Fragment”

*Upon a Life I have not lived,
Upon a Death I did not die,
Another's Life; Another's Death:
I stake my whole eternity.*

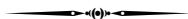
*Not on the tears which I have shed;
Not on the sorrows I have known:
Another's tears; Another's griefs;
On them I rest, on them alone.*

— Horatius Bonar, “Christ For Us”



Horatius Bonar

The Piety of Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)¹



The remarkable spiritual awakening that took place at Cambuslang, at the time five miles southeast of Glasgow, in the spring and summer of 1742 is well known in the annals of revival. It began in the February of that year with the anointed preaching of William McCulloch (1691–1771), the parish minister, and grew to the point that in July, George Whitefield (1714–1770), the leading evangelist of the eighteenth century, was preaching to crowds of 20,000 or more. Among the other ministers who also preached during those stirring days was one whom Whitefield called “good old Mr Bonner.”² The preacher to whom

1. A significant portion of this introduction was originally delivered as a paper at the 24th Annual Banner of Truth Ministers’ Conference, Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, May 29, 2002. It was subsequently published as “‘Christ is All’: Horatius Bonar (1808–1889) and his Christocentric Piety,” *Eusebeia* 3 (Autumn 2004): 23–51.

In the preparation of this introduction, I wish to acknowledge the help of Rev. William McKnight of Bangor, N. Ireland; Mrs. Faith Cook of Breaston, Derbyshire; Mrs. Marion Meadows, past librarian at Heritage Theological Seminary, Cambridge, Ontario; Rev. George McGuinness of Memphis, Tennessee; and Rev. Dr. Joel Beeke of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2. Quoted in Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Banner of

Whitefield referred was the minister of Torphichen on the outskirts of Edinburgh, John Bonar (1671–1747), a man who had a “lively zeal for the interest of true religion.”³ The revival appears to have given Bonar, who was quite infirm and unable either to ride or to walk any distance at all, a new lease on life. And though he took three days to travel the twenty-three miles or so from Torphichen to Cambuslang, he preached three times when he got there with, it was said, “great Life.”⁴ When he was about to return home, so filled with joy was he, that he used the words of another aged saint for his farewell: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,...for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”⁵

John Bonar’s evident longing for and delight in revival would characterize at least three of his great-great-grandsons who were also ministers: John James Bonar (1803–1891), ordained the minister on August 20, 1825, of St. Andrew’s parish, Greenock, where he remained until the end of his long life;⁶ Horatius Bonar (1808–1889), the subject of this book; and

Truth Trust, 1971), 121. Whitefield’s spelling is a clue to the pronunciation of the family name.

3. William McKnight, “Horatius Bonar” (Unpublished handwritten MS, 22 pages, n.d.), 3. A copy of this MS is in the author’s possession.

For a list of John Bonar’s descendants who were ministers, see *Horatius Bonar, D.D.: A Memorial*, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet / Edinburgh: Andrew Stevenson, 1890), 114–116.

4. Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 121.

5. Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 121–122.

6. On John James Bonar, see *Parting Memorial of John James Bonar, D.D.* (Greenock: James MacKelvie and Sons, 1892); Lionel Alexander Ritchie, “Bonar, Andrew Alexander,” in *Oxford Diction-*



Andrew Bonar (1810–1892)

Andrew Alexander Bonar (1810–1892), a number of whose books became devotional classics among Calvinistic evangelicals.⁷ These three Bonars were also brothers who maintained close ties throughout their long lives. For instance, they frequently preached for each other during communion seasons.⁸ G. N. M. Collins (1901–1989), for a number of years Professor of Church History in the Free Church College on the Mound in Edinburgh, knew some aged members of the Greenock church who vividly recalled from their youth a communion service in which all three brothers spoke: one on Christ as Prophet, one on Christ as Priest, and the third on Christ as King.⁹ Little wonder it was a service long remembered!

ary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6:502.

7. On Andrew Alexander Bonar, see especially Marjory Bonar, ed., *Andrew A. Bonar: The Good Pastor* (Repr., Belfast and Greenville, SC: Ambassador Publications, 1999); John J. Murray, introduction to *Andrew A. Bonar: Diary and Life*, ed. Marjory Bonar (1893; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), vii–xv; Alastair Morrice, “Andrew Bonar: Reflections on his Diary,” *The Rutherford Journal of Church & Ministry* 2, no.1 (Spring 1995), 18–20; and Ritchie, “Andrew Alexander Bonar,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6:501–502.

For a website devoted to the life and works of Andrew Bonar, see <http://www.newblehome.co.uk/bonar>.

8. R. H. Lundie, “Sermon,” in *Horatius Bonar, D.D.: A Memorial*, 12–13; H. N. Bonar, “Horatius Bonar and His Hymns,” in *Hymns by Horatius Bonar*, compiled and arranged by H. N. Bonar (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), xx; introduction to *Words Old and New*, by Horatius Bonar (1866; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), x. This introduction is a concise study of Bonar’s life and thought.

9. McKnight, “Horatius Bonar,” 7.

At the outset, a major difficulty confronts anyone seeking to study Horatius Bonar's life and piety, namely, the fact that there has never been an English biography written of him. In one sense this is quite unusual, for the world of nineteenth-century British Evangelicalism reveled in big biographies of those who were key figures in their community. In another sense, though, it is quite understandable, since Bonar himself gave strict instructions to his family and executors that there was to be no biography written of his life.¹⁰ However, in the twenty years following his death there did appear three items that help any would-be student of the life of this godly Scottish Presbyterian.

Horatius Bonar, D.D.: A Memorial contains funeral sermons preached by admirers of Bonar at the time of his death, some of Bonar's own sermons, and the first few pages of an autobiographical sketch that Bonar drew up in 1888 to celebrate his jubilee as a minister of the gospel but which he never finished.¹¹ Then there is the *Memories of Dr. Horatius Bonar*, which consists of various short reminiscences about Bonar as a Christian and about his ministry and theological convictions.¹² Most of them were written by those who had known Bonar, like David M. McIntyre (1859–1938), the colleague and successor of Horatius's younger brother Andrew in Finnieston, Glasgow. Finally, there is an essay, "Horatius Bonar

10. McKnight, "Horatius Bonar," 8.

11. *Horatius Bonar, D.D.: A Memorial*, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet / Edinburgh: Andrew Stevenson, 1890). The first edition appeared in 1889.

12. *Memories of Dr. Horatius Bonar* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1909).

and His Hymns” (1904), which was written as an introduction to a large selection of his hymns by his only son to survive him, Horatius Ninian Bonar.¹³

As Iain Murray notes, Bonar’s prohibition of a biography about his life stems from a desire for privacy and a fear of the flattery that often accompanies biographies. For him, what was most important was “the work he had been given and he wanted no other memorial.”¹⁴

Early years and theological influence

Horatius Bonar was born in Edinburgh on December 19, 1808. His parents, James Bonar (1757–1821), the Depute-Solicitor of Excise in Edinburgh, and Marjory Maitland (d. 1854), had nine children who survived infancy. James Bonar was an elder in Lady Glenorchy’s Chapel, a bulwark of Edinburgh Evangelicalism that had been founded in 1774 with money donated

13. H. N. Bonar, “Horatius Bonar and His Hymns,” in *Hymns by Horatius Bonar*, v–xxxix. For other studies of his life not hitherto mentioned, see Thomas Wilson Bayne, “Bonar, Horatius,” in *The Dictionary of National Biography* (1909; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1973), vol. 22 supplement, 231–232; John S. Andrews, “Bonar, Horatius” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1995), 1:117–118; Rosemary Mitchell, “Bonar, Horatius” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 6:502–503; and especially Iain H. Murray, “Horatius Bonar and the Love of God in Evangelism,” in *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 157–212.

On the Web, a good place to start is Dale Tedder, “The Horatius Bonar Homepage,” <http://members.aol.com/OrthodoxUM/Bonar-Home.html>.

14. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage*, 206–207.

by Lady Glenorchy (1741–1786), a wealthy patroness of Evangelical causes.¹⁵ However, James Bonar died when Horatius was only thirteen, and thus the greatest influences on him during his early years were a godly mother and his eldest brother James (1801–1867), who, like his father, would be an elder at Lady Glenorchy’s Chapel and would be deeply involved in numerous Evangelical and philanthropic enterprises.¹⁶ There are no known details, however, of Horatius’s conversion, though his brother Andrew mentions in his diary that Horatius first took the Lord’s Supper on January 3, 1830.¹⁷

He was educated at Edinburgh High School and Edinburgh University before entering the Divinity Hall, where the Professor of Divinity was Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), whom the Scottish literary figure Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) pronounced to be “the Chief Scottish man of his time.”¹⁸ Chalmers had an enormous influence upon the young Bonar. As

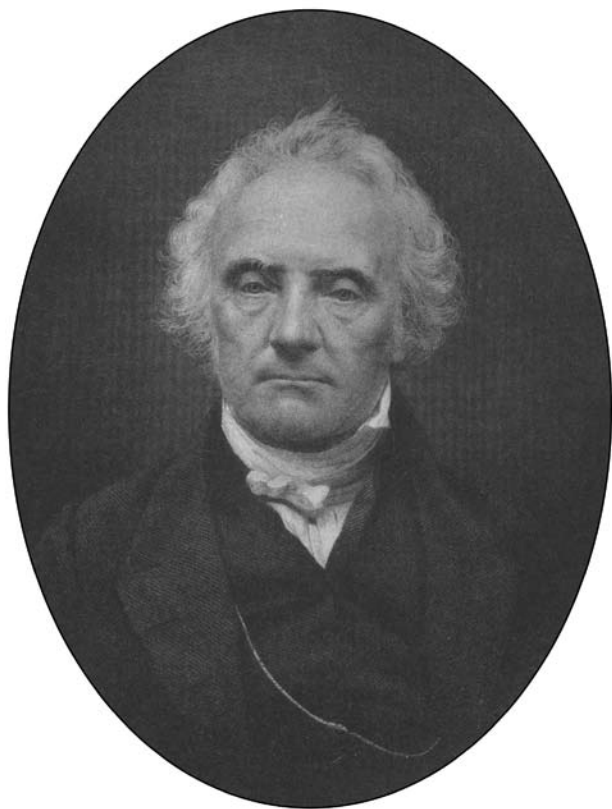
15. On Lady Glenorchy, see D. P. Thomson, *Lady Glenorchy and her Churches—The Story of 200 Years* (Barnock, Crieff, Perthshire: The Research Unit, [1967]) and D. A. Currie, “Glenorchy, Lady” in *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, 1:367–368.

16. On this James Bonar, see Donald M. Lewis, “Bonar, James” in *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, 1:118.

17. *Andrew A. Bonar: Diary and Life*, 9.

18. For two excellent sketches of Chalmers’s life and ministry, see A. C. Cheyne, “Chalmers, Thomas,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 158–161 and Stewart J. Brown, “Chalmers, Thomas,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 10:879–887.

The quote from Carlyle is taken from the Thomas Chalmers website: <http://www.newble.co.uk/chalmers/>.



Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847)

another of Chalmers's students later said of him, "We never met with an individual who had the power Dr. Chalmers possessed of lifting the mind above earthly views."¹⁹

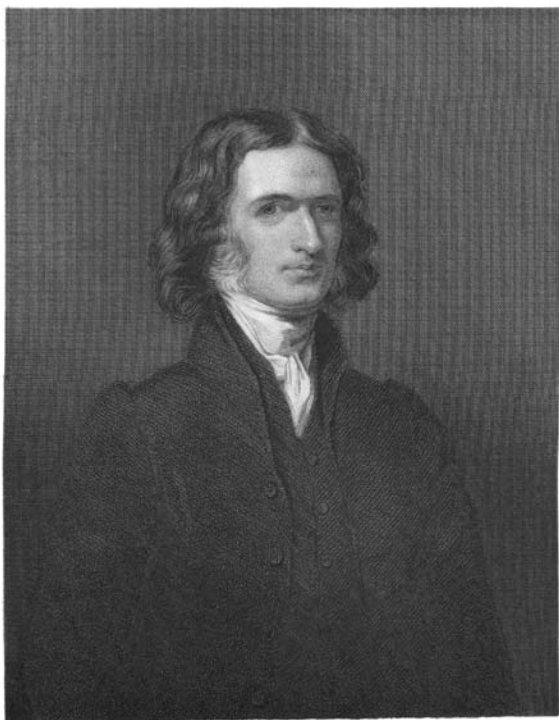
Chalmers is chiefly remembered for his key role in the events that led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. But his influence should by no means be limited to those events. For instance, it was from among Chalmers's students that the first generation of Church of Scotland missionaries to India came, of whom the most notable is Alexander Duff (1806–1878).²⁰ Chalmers was also convinced that all truth was God's truth and that the Christian faith should relate and be applied to every aspect of society. His funeral in 1847 was a national event, drawing thousands of mourners from across every spectrum of Scottish life. If Horatius Bonar and his fellow students loved the gospel before they entered seminary, it is certain that that love was greatly increased by sitting at the feet of Chalmers. Their subsequent ministry was deeply and lastingly enriched by having sat under Chalmers's teaching. Horatius Bonar considered Chalmers the greatest Christian he had ever known.²¹

Another important influence on the young Bonar, as well as on his younger brother Andrew, were some

19. Quoted in Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 379.

20. For the account of Chalmers's influence in this regard, see Stuart Piggin and John Roxborough, *The St. Andrew Seven: The Finest Flowering of Missionary Zeal in Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985).

21. H. N. Bonar, "Horatius Bonar and His Hymns," xxviii.



Edward Irving (1792–1834)

lectures on the Book of Revelation that were given in Edinburgh over the years 1828 to 1830 by Edward Irving (1792–1834). At the time, Irving was one of the most popular Presbyterian preachers. In 1833, though, he would be removed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland for espousing the view that Christ’s humanity was so one with that of all human beings that He possessed sinful inclinations. In Irving’s estimation, only Christ’s being indwelt by the Holy Spirit prevented Him from actually sinning. Horatius Bonar, though, would have agreed with his friend Robert Murray McCheyne (1813–1843) when the latter described Irving as “a holy man in spite of all his delusions and errors.”²²

Andrew Bonar later recalled the influence that Irving’s premillennial convictions had on him and his brother and a few other students:

May I tell you the history of some of us in Edinburgh? It is about sixty years since I myself felt the first thrill of interest in this subject—when Edward Irving was preaching in this city. He had lectures at seven in the morning during the time of the General Assembly, and for two or three years in succession, on prophetic subjects. We used to go at six in the morning to get a good seat. But I remember what led me to decision was the calm reading of Matthew 24. That chapter decided me on this subject. I could not see a foot-breadth of room for the Millennium before Christ comes in

22. Andrew A. Bonar, *The Life of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 35.

the clouds. It is wave upon wave of tribulation till the Son of Man appears.²³

The long-lasting influence of Irving’s lectures on Horatius in particular can be seen, for instance, in *The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*, a publication that he edited from 1849 to 1873 and that was designed to promote premillennial eschatology. More than a few of his hymns also sought to press home this prophetic perspective. A good example is “I know not in what watch He comes,” written in mid-March, 1880. The first stanza and final two run thus:

I know not in what watch He comes,
Or at what hour He may appear,
Whether at midnight or at morn,
Or in what season of the year;
I only know that He is near.

...The centuries have gone and come,
Dark centuries of absence drear;
I dare not chide the long delay,
Nor ask when I His voice shall hear;
I only know that He is near.

I do not think it can be long
Till in His glory He appear;
And yet I dare not name the day,
Nor fix the solemn Advent year;
I only know that He is near.²⁴

23. Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 195.

24. Horatius Bonar, *Hymns by Horatius Bonar*, compiled and arranged by H. N. Bonar (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), 207–208.

A third important influence with regard to Horatius Bonar's spiritual growth during his days at the Divinity Hall came from a circle of friends that included two of his brothers—John James and Andrew; Robert McCheyne;²⁵ Alexander Neil Somerville (1813–1889), later minister of Anderston Church, Glasgow, and a full-time evangelist from 1877 onwards;²⁶ John Milne (1807–1868), later the minister of St. Leonard's in Perth and whose biography Horatius Bonar wrote after Milne's death;²⁷ and a number of other young men. Iain Murray notes that Horatius appears to have been the leader among this group of students.²⁸ Something of the way in which this group of friends served as spiritual mentors to one another can be seen in the following two extracts from Andrew Bonar's diary, both from the year 1835:

Also see the discussion of Bonar's eschatology by David M. McIntyre, "The Second Advent," in *Memories of Dr. Horatius Bonar*, 45–52.

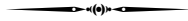
For the broader development of premillennialism during the nineteenth century, see David Bebbington, "The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800," *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1988), 103–114.

25. On McCheyne, see especially Andrew A. Bonar, *The Life of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960); L. J. van Valen, *Constrained by His Love: A New Biography on Robert Murray McCheyne* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002); and Michael D. McMullen, "McCheyne, Robert Murray," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 35:122–123.

26. On Somerville, see E. I. Carlyle, "Somerville, Alexander Neil," revised by Lionel Alexander Ritchie in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 51:607; I. D. Maxwell, "Somerville, Alexander Neil" in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, 787.

27. Horatius Bonar, *Life of the Rev. John Milne of Perth* (Edinburgh and London: James Nisbet, 1869).

28. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage*, 163.



No ordinary work¹

Our churches have been likened to Bethesdas (John 5:2). In all of them lie a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. But often they seem to wait in vain. The water remains untroubled; no angel comes down; no one steps into the pool, either before or behind his sick fellow; few are healed. The complaint of many of us is, “Lord, who hath believed our report?”²

The power of the pulpit is said to lie on the wane. Yet learning and eloquence are admitted to be in full play. All kinds of artificial appliances—music, ornament, humour, style, rhetoric, architecture—have been called in to prop up the pulpit and neutralise, or at least minimise, its supposed failure.³ But as galvanism is not life, so these artificial stimulants leave the failure just where they found it, or rather, somewhat increased by reaction. Such stimulants are a poor substitute for a faded first love, a sad compensation

1. From *Our Ministry: How It Touches the Questions of the Age* (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1883), 74–76, *passim*.

2. Romans 10:16.

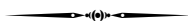
3. In connection with the “decline and fall” of the Roman Empire, a singular fact has been recorded. When the arts were declining—poetry, sculpture, painting, deteriorating—religion and patriotism decaying—music was cultivated to an extraordinary extent. Old Rome died music-mad [Bonar’s footnote].

for the Holy Spirit grieved and quenched. They may result in serious evils, greater even than those which they are seeking to cure. At all events, they are not the divine remedies prescribed for Sardis or Laodicea.⁴

Yet I may say here that the work among the lapsed is not ordinary work. “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”⁵ It is a work that tries a minister’s faith and strength; and it is not to be done by fits and starts, nor lightly entered on, as if any one could undertake it. It is the roughest, sorest work to which we are called, and it needs hardy men, men of no common faith and love. It is border warfare, and it asks for border men. And while every minister of Christ is really set apart for some such warfare, this calls specially for frontier men, picked warriors for the breach...men trained for this special service—not raw recruits, but the flower of Christian discipleship, youthful in spirit, yet veterans in experience, men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, to be launched against the strongholds of the god of this world, now more formidable and more ably manned than ever. Let us own our need of such men, and ask them of Him who alone can raise them up to do service for Christ, to do work, which only such men can do, and to win battles which only such men can win.

4. In his *Life of the Rev. John Milne of Perth* (London: James Nisbet, 1869), 18, Bonar noted: “Religion in a soul or a church must be sick and ready to die, when it requires the use of stimulants to restore it, the stimulants of music, and dresses, and postures, and ceremonies; or the stimulants of speculation and mysticism, and the ‘enticing words of man’s wisdom.’ Rather, we may say, that it is dead; and these are galvanic appliances to make a dead man look, and stare, and roll his eyes like a living one.”

5. Matthew 17:21.



God's trees grow slowly¹

God's processes are not always rapid. His greatest works rise slowly. Swiftness of growth has been one of man's tests of greatness; not so is it with God. His trees grow slowly; the stateliest are the slowest. His flowers grow slowly; the brightest are the slowest. His creatures grow slowly, year by year; man, the noblest, grows the most slowly of all. God can afford to take His time. Man cannot. He is hasty and impatient.... He forgets how slowly the palm tree and the cedar grow. They neither spring up in a night nor perish in a night. He forgets the history of the temple: "Forty and six years was this temple in building."² He insists that, because it is God's purpose that His saints should be holy, therefore they ought to be holy at once.

1. From *The Everlasting Righteousness* (London: James Nisbet, 1873), 192–194, passim. In a book review of this volume that appeared in *The Sword and Trowel* (March 1873), 138, Charles H. Spurgeon wrote that this latest volume from Bonar was a "rich book, suggestive, gracious, full of holy unction. Unlike many writers of the Evangelical school Dr. Bonar is not content with baling out milk for babes, but gives us real thought and teaching. There never was any need that orthodoxy and platitudes should go together, but they often have done so; no one can bring that charge in reference to this work. We say to all our friends, read and be refreshed."

2. John 2:20.



Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)

It is true that our standard is, and must be, perfection. For our model is the Perfect One. But the question is, "Has God in Scripture anywhere led us to expect the rapidity of growth, the quick development of perfection in which some glory, and because of the confessed lack of which in others they look down on these others as babes or loiterers?"

Is there in Scripture any instance of a perfect man, excepting Him who was always and absolutely without sin?

If Christians were perfect, where is the warfare, and the adversary, and the sword, and the shield? Are angels exposed to this warfare when they visit earth? Or is it not our imperfection that in great measure produces this? And are we anywhere in Scripture led to believe that we are delivered from "the body of this death,"³ from the battle of flesh and spirit, from the wrestling with principalities and powers, till death sets us free, or our Lord shall come?

Yet we are called with a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9); and as so called, are bound to take the highest standard for our model of life. The slowness or swiftness of the progress does not alter the standard, nor affect our aiming at conformity to it.

3. Romans 7:24.

