

A letter from a 26-year-old Robert Murry M'Cheyne, seeking to shepherd a young man who had recently moved out of his father's house. Let his words shepherd your soul as well.

My Dear G...

You will be surprised to hear from me. I have often wished to be better acquainted with you; but in these sad parishes we cannot manage to know and be intimate with everyone we would desire. And now you have left your father's roof and our charge; still my desires go after you, as well as the kind thoughts of many others; and since I cannot now speak to you, I take this way of expressing my thoughts to you. I do not know in what light you look upon me, whether as a grave and morose minister, or as one who might be a companion and friend; but really, it is so short a while since I was just like you, when I enjoyed the games which you now enjoy, and read the books which you now read, that I never can think of myself as anything more than a boy. This is one great reason why I write to you. The same youthful blood flows in my veins that flows in yours, the same fancies and buoyant passions dance in my bosom as in yours; so that when I would persuade you to come with me to the same Saviour, and to walk the rest of your life 'led by the Spirit of God,' I am not persuading you to anything beyond your years. I am not like a grey-headed grandfather, - then you might answer all I say by telling me that you are not a boy. No; I am almost as much a boy as you are; as fond of happiness and of life as you are; as fond of scampering over the hills, and seeing all that is to be seen, as you are.

Another thing that persuades me to write you, my dear boy, is, that I have felt in my own experience the want of having a friend to direct and counsel me. I had a kind brother as you have, who taught me many things. He gave me a Bible, and persuaded me to read it; he tried to train me as a gardener trains the apple-tree upon the wall; but all in vain. I thought myself far wiser than he, and would always take my own way; and many a time, I well remember, I have seen him reading his Bible, or shutting his closet door to pray, when I have been dressing to go to some frolic, or some dance of folly. Well, this dear friend and brother died; and though his death made a greater impression upon me than ever his life had done, still I found the misery of being friendless. I do not mean that I had no relations and worldly friends, for I had many; but I had no friend who cared for my soul. I had none to direct me to the Saviour—none to awaken my slumbering conscience—none to tell me about the blood of Jesus washing away all sin—none to tell me of the Spirit who is so willing to change the heart, and give the victory over passions. I had no minister to take me by the hand, and say, 'Come with me, and we will do thee good.' Yes, I had one friend and minister, but that was Jesus himself, and He led me in a way that makes me give Him, and Him only, all the praise. Now, though Jesus may do this again, yet the more common way with Him is to use earthly guides. Now, if I could supply the place of such a guide to you, I should be happy. To be a finger-post is all that I want to be—pointing out the way. This is what I so much wanted myself; this is what you need not want, unless you wish.

Tell me, dear G., would you work less pleasantly through the day—would you walk the streets with a more doleful step—would you eat your meat with less gladness of heart—would you sleep less tranquilly at night—if you had the forgiveness of sins, that is, if all your wicked thoughts and deeds—lies, thefts, and Sabbath-breakings—were all blotted out of God's book of remembrance? Would this make you less happy, do you think? You dare not say it would. But would the forgiveness of sins not make you more happy than you are? Perhaps you will tell me that you are very happy as you are. I quite believe

you. I know that I was very happy when I was unforgiven. I know that I had great pleasure in many sins—in Sabbath-breaking, for instance. Many a delightful walk I have had,—speaking my own words, thinking my own thoughts, and seeking my own pleasure on God's holy day. I fancy few boys were ever happier in an unconverted state than I was. No sorrow clouded my brow—no tears filled my eyes, unless over some nice story-book; so that I know that you say quite true, when you say that you are happy as you are. But ah! is not this just the saddest thing of all, that you should be happy whilst you are a child of wrath,—that you should smile, and eat, and drink, and be merry, and sleep sound, when this very night you may be in hell? Happy while unforgiven!—a terrible happiness. It is like the Hindoo widow who sits upon the funeral pile with her dead husband, and sings songs of joy when they are setting fire to the wood with which she is to be burned. Yes, you may be quite happy in this way, till you die, my boy; but when you look back from hell, you will say, it was a miserable kind of happiness. Now, do you think it would not give you more happiness to be forgiven, - to be able to put on Jesus, and say, 'God's anger is turned away?' Would not you be happier at work, and happier in the house, and happier in your bed? I can assure you from all that ever I have felt of it, the pleasures of being forgiven are as superior to the pleasures of an unforgiven man, as heaven is higher than hell. The peace of being forgiven reminds me of the calm, blue sky, which no earthly clamors can disturb. It lightens all labors, sweetens every morsel of bread, and makes a sick-bed all soft and downy; yea, it takes away the scowl of death. Now, forgiveness may be yours now. It is not given to those who are good. It is not given to any because they are less wicked than others. It is given only to those who, feeling that their sins have brought a curse on them which they cannot lift off, 'look unto Jesus,' as bearing all away.

Now, my dear boy, I have no wish to weary you. If you are anything like what I was, you will have yawned many a time already over this letter. However, if the Lord deal graciously with you, and touch your young heart, as I pray He may, with a desire to be forgiven, and to be made a child of God, perhaps you will not take ill what I have written to you in much haste. As this is the first time you have been away from home, perhaps you have not learned to write letters yet; but if you have, I would like to hear from you, how you come on—what convictions you feel, if you feel any—what difficulties, what parts of the Bible puzzle you, and then I would do my best to unravel them. You read your Bible regularly, of course; but do try and understand it, and still more, to feel it. Read more parts than one at a time. For example, if you are reading Genesis, read a psalm also; or, if you are reading Matthew, read a small bit of an epistle also. Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the 1st Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel, and pray, 'O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man,' etc. 'Let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly,' etc. This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible, and of learning to pray. In prayer confess your sins by name—going over those of the past day, one by one. Pray for your friends by name—father, mother, etc. etc. If you love them, surely you will pray for their souls. I know well that there are prayers constantly ascending for you from your own house; and will you not pray for them back again? Do this regularly. If you pray sincerely for others, it will make you pray for yourself.

But I must be done. Good-bye, dear G.

Remember me to your brother kindly, and believe me your sincere friend,

R.M.M.