
Sukey Harley



Jane Gilpin

MEMOIR OF
SUKEY HARLEY

OF THE PARISH OF
PULVERBATCH, NEAR SHREWSBURY

BY JANE GILPIN
THE LATE RECTOR'S DAUGHTER

“I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.” – Psalm 101. 1.

“Let Epicureans despise these things! Examples of this kind – whether found in Christ Himself, or in ‘our brethren that are in the world,’ will be more precious to the truly godly and spiritual, than all the treasures and riches of which the world can boast.” – Martin Luther.

2008
Gospel Standard Trust Publications
12(b) Roundwood Lane
Harpenden, Hertfordshire
AL5 3BZ

ISBN 978-1-897837-87-0

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First printed in this edition: 2008

Cover picture: Stiperstones and Long Mynd, Shropshire
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Other pictures courtesy of Den Hertog, Holland

*Printed by
Cromwell Press Limited
White Horse Business Park
Aintree Avenue
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 0XB*

PREFACE

THIS little memoir might probably never have appeared in print, had not a part of it (viz. “The account taken from Sukey Harley’s lips”) found its way into a religious magazine about the year 1837. Afterwards this was reprinted as a separate tract; but still without the writer’s knowledge – those who reprinted it supposing it to detail the life of a person long since dead, whereas Sukey Harley was at that time living.

The tract thus passed through more than one edition and Sukey Harley became known to many who expressed a lively interest in her case. It was therefore judged expedient to add to the “Account” a few of her conversations, as also the particulars of her death; the whole being rightly adjusted so as to make the publication uniform.

Demand being still made for it, it is now again sent forth into the world under a hope that the blessing of God may attend the perusal of it in many hearts.

Jane Gilpin

Pulverbatch, Shrewsbury, February 1881

Publisher’s Note

In this edition, chapters, headings and subheadings have been added and punctuation modernised to make reading easier. In one case the order of the text has been changed to make the structure more logical. The village of Pulverbatch was usually spelt “Pulverbach” when this book was written, but the modern spelling has been used throughout.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

SUKEY HARLEY, whose name before her marriage was Overton, was born at Prolimoor, in the parish of Wentnor, on the Long Mynd, a wild and beautiful part of the country in Shropshire. She was the youngest but one of sixteen children, some of whom died in infancy; but a large family of them growing up, and her parents being poor, her education was much neglected. She had not even the advantage of being taught to read, a privilege which some of her elder brothers and sisters possessed.

She married very young. Her husband, Charles Harley, was a sober, quiet, industrious man, who gained a livelihood as a day labourer among the farmers. Some years after their marriage they went to live at Ryton, a small village not far from Shrewsbury. Here it pleased God to bring her to a deep and spiritual conviction of her awful state as a sinner, and in the midst of her heathenish ignorance to awaken a cry in her heart for that mercy she had never before felt the need of; in answer to which (being the cry of His own Spirit within her) He revealed to her dark soul eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

About three years after this time they went to live at Pulverbatch, and here it was the writer first became acquainted with her, to whom some years afterwards she gave the remarkable account of her conversion which has already appeared in print, and which is here republished with no other alteration than the correction of an occasional mistake.

Sukey was naturally of a lively, cheerful disposition, particularly frank and warm hearted. Consequently her attachments were strong and not readily relinquished. She was exceedingly prompt and energetic in all her proceedings, truly sympathising to those persons whom she knew to be in distress, and heartily willing to show a kindness to any who needed it, whenever occasion served.

During the latter years of her life she had to struggle through many adversities - infirm health, domestic affliction, and poverty. For the last of these it pleased God to open the hearts of many friends, so that she never came into that destitution she otherwise might have done. In this she found continual cause for thankfulness and praise to her heavenly Father, who thus graciously opened a way for the supply of her necessities, while those who had

MEMOIR OF SUKEY HARLEY

been made the means of administering to her comfort were always remembered by her with grateful affection.

She died in the summer of 1853, in the seventieth year of her age, at Pulverbatch, where she had resided near forty years.

CHAPTER 2

SUKEY HARLEY'S OWN ACCOUNT

Upbringing and Early Life

“I was always thought odd by all my mother’s children. There were sixteen of us altogether; two or three died in infancy. I was the youngest but one, that was Winney. My father took to me more than all the rest. I have heard my mother say he meant to have made me a fine scholar if he had lived, but he died when I was only three years old. I remember when he died very well. He was hanging his head over me - I was lying in the bed with him. He dropped his head down and fell upon me. I remember my mother pulling me away, and she wrapped me up in her checked apron, and carried me off, and I remember her dismal distress.

“Before my father died, I used to watch for his getting up in the morning, and used to call out, ‘Dad, is it a fine day? Is it clear all round?’ ‘Yes, Tooty, it’s clear all round.’ Then I would get up and help him to make the fire, and I have heard my mother say I was always busy about somewhat. I was a very odd child.

“My poor mother was left in great distress when my father died. It was never in her power to put me to school. I was never taught anything about God in my childhood, nor about His blessed Son Jesus Christ. The only thing I can remember learning when a child was the Lord’s Prayer. We were taught to repeat that after we were in bed every night, and they called it ‘saying our prayers.’ But what it meant I knew nothing about.

“I used to take wondrous delight in washing my doll’s clothes, and getting up at four o’clock in the morning to steal the soap. I also once stole a bit of pink ribbon for my doll. When I look back upon all this, it brings great experience upon my heart.

“We used sometimes to be very badly off. My mother used to go out to nurse, and remain out a month or six weeks at a time. Winney and I were left in charge of an elder sister. The meat would sometimes be all gone long before my mother came home. We were badly clemm’d.¹

¹ Clemmed - famished or starved.

“I used to take my little sister and go out to gather sour sauce in the fields. I remember once a neighbour came and sent us away. I thought it very hard, but he did not know it was satisfying hunger. Poor Winney cried. My sister looked at her - she was clemm’d as well as we, and she said, ‘Poor thing, put your thumb in your mouth.’ I felt very sorrowful.

“I had very dismal thoughts sometimes. I think I might be about ten or eleven years old, I felt so odd in my mind, as if I were shaken. Somewhat strange came over me, a great dread. I felt so frightened, I dared not be left alone. I was so fearful and full of trembling that I could not tell what ailed me, or what was the matter. I used to look on the world, and I thought it looked dismal. I used to have such fits of crying I could give no reason for to anyone. I used to wonder what could be the matter.

“I used to wander about the fields by myself, and had very dismal thoughts about the world. I remember one day wandering over a hill at the bottom of my mother’s garden. There was a big rock hollowed out, and I went in and sat down. Well, there came such a blessed comfort into my soul, but I knew nothing about where it came from, or what it meant. I should think this must have been the Lord working in my heart, and these fears and tremblings must have been from Him, making me afraid of my wicked crimes. For I was at this time a very wild, unruly child, and as I grew up I cared for no restraint or correction. I was wilful and obstinate, and chose my own way. These fears were soon off, and I heeded nothing. I chose my own path, the downward road to hell.

“When big enough to go out to service, I was hired at a farmhouse. I made a good servant, I loved work. The farmers were all glad to get me into their houses I got through such a lot of work, and was as fond of frolic and play. I gave free license to my tongue. To my shame be it spoken, I could hardly open my mouth but I would fetch an oath. It was dreadful.

“I married very young. My husband was a very quiet, steady and sober man. He was never fond of drink, nor of levity of any sort like the rest of the young men. I used to despise him in my heart, and say, ‘Well, what a fool I have got for a husband.’ He’d just go right on with his work, and take no notice of anything. Backwards and forwards, down the lane and up again, to and fro, morning and night, day by day; it was always the same with him. He’d just mind his own business and care for nothing else. ‘Well,’ I would think with myself, ‘what a dolt my Charles is!’

“Whenever he heard me curse and swear, he would rebuke me, but very mildly. He used to say, ‘Sukey, I wish I could hear you talk without swearing, I

wish you would leave off them words.' I was ready to hit him for downright rage. Excepting these bouts we never had any miss words with each other, and a good reason why – he never gave me any, so then I had none to give him.

"Once I remember on a Sunday morning he said to me (but very mildly), 'Sukey, you ought to get me a clean shirt to put on of a Sunday, and a pair of stockings mended, like any other poor man's wife.' I was sadly cut down at this remark, and I thought to myself, 'Well, what an oafish wife I must be not to know this before. I wonder how the other women do.' The next Saturday I went round and peeped into all the neighbours' houses. I found the women all busy washing their husbands' and children's things. I was badly hurt to find that I had-na' treated my husband as well as the rest of the folks. I went home and washed and mended his shirt and stockings. Ever after that bout I took care to have a clean shirt and stockings for him against Sunday.

"I used to make it a practice to go out to the shop for flour, tea and butter, always on the Sunday morning. The woman that kept the shop always told me she did not like it, but I never heeded her. One Sunday I took Charles along with me to carry some of the things. He made no more profession of religion than I did; we were quite ignorant. The woman said again, 'I wish you would not come on Sunday.' Charles would never let me go to the shop on Sundays after that. 'Well,' I thought, 'what an oddity man he is to mind what the woman says.' But we neither of us knew any more about the Sabbath than the beasts of the field.

"We went to live at Church Stretton, where my child was born. Afterwards we lived for a short time at Dorrington, and then removed to Ryton. We were at this time very well off – mighty well to live. We kept two pigs; we had enough and to spare, no lack of this world's goods. I made a sight of money; that was all I cared for in this world.

"I made acquaintance with all the idle, frivolous girls in the village. I should think that there was not the like to be found in all the country – hooting and bawling, shouting, gammocking² and romping. On the Sabbath morning we used to collect together in a large barn, dancing and revelling, and fooling away the time. I was a very good tuner on the fiddle, and they used to dance. This is the way my Sabbaths were spent.

"But for all this I was proud enough of my moral conduct. I never went further than what I have named in profligacy. I thought I was a mighty good sort of woman, and very moral. I never told a lie, so far as I remember. It

² Gammocking – foolish sport or practical jokes.

must have been the Lord that kept my black tongue from telling lies in the days of my ignorance. My word would settle a dispute amongst the neighbours, I had such a character for speaking the truth. There was the same black deceit in my heart as in any other, but it was the Lord who gave me a real abhorrence of falsehood.

“I never thought about such a thing as religion. To be sure, I used to hear talk sometimes, but it was with deaf ears. I used to answer it to myself, ‘Well, it’s for the gentlefolks to mind religion, and for such as are fine scholars.’ I used to wonder sometimes on a Sunday what the folks went to church for. I used to see ’em pass to and fro, and I would like puzzle my mind a bit. Then I would consider, ‘Well, this is for the gentlefolks.’

“I was not suffered to take any formalist ways. What I was I was, out and out before all, brazen-faced. I have often thought of my brazen face. My disposition was evil, my inclination was evil, my heart and life were evil, the imagination of my thoughts were evil. I was clean lost, and as insensible as the stones under my feet.”

Soul Trouble and Deliverance

“The first thing that gave a turn to my manner of living was being called on by two women, neighbours, who wished me to go with them to meeting. I refused; but when they came again, and pressed me very much, I began to fear they would call me a bad neighbour, so to please them I went. I paid no attention to what was going on there.

“When I came home I found that a currant cake I had made for my brother, who was sick at the Black Lion, had been stolen out of my house. This made me so angry that I said I would ne’er go to meeting any more. The next day came round, and they came again. I was still afraid of being called a bad neighbour, so I yielded, and went along with ’em. When I came home I found that my husband and house and all had like to have been burnt. Charles had set his shirt sleeve on fire, and the flame rose up and caught the timber, and it had all like to have been burnt.

“Now I was determined I would go no more to meeting, and when the two women came next time I said, ‘The devil has been at our house, I will ne’er go with you any more.’ The meeting used to be held at one of the women’s houses. But these two would come and pester me to go to church or chapel. I put them off a good while; they still kept teasing me. At last I said, ‘Well, I must have a new gown, and a new bonnet, and a new shawl, and then perhaps

I may go.' I sold my pig and bought these things, and I went with the women to church next Sabbath.

"I went two or three times in my new things. The women were almost ashamed of my company, I had dressed myself out such a sight, but they dared not say a word to me, fearing I should leave off going. The devil had fine possession of my heart then. 'Ah!' thought I, 'I am now godly, I'm a right good neighbour now.' I made a god of these women, but I hated them. I kept thinking all the while that they were gathered together against me, and so I feared them, so 'feared of bearing a bad character with them.

"But I was ignorant of a holy God. I was ignorant of my vileness, my devilish, hellish heart. My sins were hid from my sight, but my God knew me though I knew not Him, as shall hereafter appear. He chastised me, He choosed me, and He began to work in my poor dark soul. Though I knew not His hand, yet His hand was with me, lugging me, teasing me, pulling me to Himself, and I scrambling to get away. Oh! blessed be His holy Name for ever. It was all His own doing, and He shall have all the honour.

"I followed the women two or three times to church and chapel in my new things. It was now my trouble began. I soon flung away the new things - it was the devil made me put them on, and it was the devil made me throw them off. He had possession of my heart. At last I went such a sight to church, with my cap all collared and the strings dangling about. Well, the women were ashamed of my company again, just in the other extreme, but they durst not speak about it. I was such an odd woman, so hampered and entangled by the devil and my wicked heart.

"This was my trouble, the thought that these women had got something that I had-na' got, this was it that troubled me. All day long my thoughts were hampered, my mind was tossicated about this thing: 'What have these women got? I wish I knew what they have got.' Oh! I was sore distressed; I was heavily burdened. I was weary, weary in mind to know somewhat about it.

"Nothing that ever I heard in church or chapel at that time ever struck my mind; I never paid attention there. My trouble wasn't brought on by the word of man. I could tell no man what ailed me, not even my husband. I did-na' know, I could-na' find out myself what was the matter.

"I would for ever make some light excuse to know what they two were about. I would peep into old Nancy Smith's door. She would come out, the big tears standing in her eyes, and the Book in her hand. Well, I hated her. Then I'd go to the other. 'Sukey,' she'd say, 'do come and sit down, and I'll

read to you a bit.’ Well, I’d say and think to-myself, ‘I do hate to come nigh ’em.’

“Then I would look upon her countenance. Oh, what a blessed look I thought she had in the midst of all her poverty and outward wretchedness. ‘She is a deal worse off than myself,’ thought I, ‘though I am miserable and she is blessed. What does it mean? They must have somewhat. I wish I knew what they have found.’

“Then I’d go home pondering on this matter, puzzling my foolish brains to find out what they’d got, tossed to and fro. I was weary, weary, weary. Day and night I could find no rest. Oh! I wanted something I could-na’ get. I began to think there must be a God. Then I thought, ‘These women know that God.’ They used to tell me I must pray, so in hopes of knowing their God I did pray - that is, I said the Lord’s Prayer o’er and o’er and o’er again. This was all the praying I knew.

“I used to take great notice of the clouds. ‘Well,’ I’d think, ‘what can it be? Is it smoke out of all the chimneys gone and settled up there?’ Then again I’d think, ‘It canna’ be smoke; sometimes they be all cleared off. Well, there must be a God to make these.’

“I now began to be in great terror, it’s impossible to say what confused thoughts I had at this time. No heart but those that have experienced it can tell what dreadful feelings and tremblings and shakings possessed my mind. This was the way my God was leading me to Himself.

“One Sabbath when I was at church, this thought came to my mind: ‘Suppose those great big clouds should burst and fall upon my head; suppose this church should fall upon me.’ Well, I began to be in such terror. Then I thought, ‘It will not fall down upon those two women. I’ll get close against Nancy Rowland, then I shall be safe.’ I made a great clatter in the church changing my place; all the folks would stare at me. I was such a poor crack-brained thing.

“One day I went to Nancy Rowland’s as usual to see if I could find out what she had got. She said, ‘Sukey, do come in and stop and take a dish of tea with me.’ I said, ‘Well, I will.’ While the kettle was boiling, she read a tract to me. I never paid the least attention to it; not one word could I tell what it was about. Her children came in; she cut ’em each a bit of bread. They took it and seemed thankful, they made their obeisance to me and went off. Then Nancy took and cut me such nice thin slices of bread and butter, honouring me like. I wondered at it, and I looked at her poverty and rags. ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘her has got something; I wish I knew what she has got.’

“When I came home, it came into my head to take her some bread and bacon. I cut her ever such a lot and carried it up to her house. I thought she would be glad of it and would think me such a good neighbour. She seemed to take so little heed of it. She put her hands on the table and looked up; she was silent. I know now what she was doing. She was giving God thanks, but I then thought she ought to have thanked me more. Ah! how ignorant I was.

“I went on in this way for three-quarters of a year, all beside one fortnight. I was in a dreadful, distressed, tossicated state, the poorest, destitute creature on the face of the earth. I knew no God, that was the thing that kept me so wretched. I was such a harum-scarum, senseless thing, and very wicked. Nancy Smith would often rebuke me. She lived close up against me, so she heard so much of it. How I would curse and swear at the least thing that put me out of the way. She used to put her head out of the door and say, ‘Oh! Sukey Harley, hell will be your portion.’ I hated her. I thought she would tell Nancy Rowland, and they would think me a bad neighbour.

“I remember one very wet day seeing her pass my door to a meeting up at Lyth Hill. I said to Charles, ‘Well, what a foolish old woman that is to go to those hypocrisy meetings! I do wonder what she can mean.’ Then I would be all in a puzzle again, ‘What can these two women have got between them?’ I hated them, and yet I was always hankering after them. I thought if I could but find out what they knew, I could prove their hypocrisy words, but I could not tell what to say to them, because they *did* know somewhat which I could not get at, so that I was clean done up with them. I could never find how to answer them.

“I would sometimes think of that word, *hell*. This would fasten on my mind, ‘This must be somewhat dreadful.’ Some nights I would be afraid of closing my eyes, lest I should tumble into hell. One day I was fluttered about two little pigs; I could-na’ get them into the sty. I cursed and swore at them as usual. Old Nancy Smith came and said, ‘Oh, Sukey, Sukey, thee must be born again!’ Well, these words confounded me, they clean updid me. ‘What *can* the old hypocrite mean?’

“I soon clapped the pigs into the sty and went off to Nancy Rowland’s. I loved her better than the other because she was meeker. I said, ‘What do you think that old Methodist woman says to me?’ ‘What?’ ‘Why, she says I must be born again! Now,’ says I, ‘Nancy, how can this be? If it is in the Bible I will believe it.’ She was silent, but she reached the Bible, and found the place, and read the words, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (John 3.3).

“Well, did I believe ’em? No, I had no faith, how could I believe? And I say, no sinner can believe, nor do the least thing towards it till the Lord is pleased to send him that true faith down from heaven. Then he believes, but never till then, and if he think he does, it is only the deceit of the devil and his own heart. This is how it was with me, and by that I think it must be the same with others too. I could not believe those words for all they were read to me out of the Bible.

“I said, ‘Nancy, how can it be? And which way is it to be done? How is it I never heard this before? Now, suppose my mother is dead, why, what a thing this is, and I never to hear this before. Well,’ I said, ‘what a lot here is to be done. How am I come to this age, six-and-twenty and more, and never been told this before.’

“Well, these words ’bided with me, I could not get shut on ’em: ‘Thee must be born again!’ I had no more understanding of them than a dead corpse. I was rumbled and fluttered in my mind to find out the sense of these words. I heard nothing of what the woman said about it, but I was led like to ponder them over and over in my mind. I seemed to be all the while, in my confused way, going to God, though for all I did not know Him. I did feel that it was only He that could give me satisfaction. ‘Oh!’ I thought, ‘if I did but know *their* God, then I should know all about it.’ Well, He was lugging me to Himself all the while, but I was so ignorant and foolish, I was as a beast before Him. I often think of that verse, Psalm 73.22, aye, and I am the very same now, just like a beast.

“Well, I began to grow worse and worse, more full of perplexed thoughts than ever. I was tossed to and fro. What was I to do? I did-na’ know what to do. ‘The reason I don’t know God is, because I cannot read. Those two women are such fine scholars, they can read such a sight of books. They can pray, they have got such a sight of prayers, and I only know this one.’ Then I thought, ‘I must have a new prayer, the old prayer won’t do.’

“I kept repeating it over and over again, but I wanted a new prayer. I mourned, I cried to God to teach me a new prayer. ‘Yes!’ I said to my dear Father in heaven – for He was my Father though I did not know Him – and I cried to Him, and mourned before Him. I begged Him to teach me a new prayer. These words clapped into my mind: ‘Lord, lead me into the true knowledge of Thy dear Son.’ I never heard that God had a Son, yet these words came into my heart. It was the prayer God taught me Himself, no one else taught me. I never, never heard what those two women would be bantering me about. I was so tossicated with my own thoughts, I gave no heed to their words. The Lord put those words into my heart.

“I seemed quite rejoiced that *their* God had taught me. He had eked out my prayer a little longer, for I still kept saying the Lord’s prayer, and added those new words to the end of it. I never coveted any fresh words after this. Well, I prayed this new prayer for about a fortnight. On the Sunday night after the fortnight, I went with the women to chapel. I was in a dreadful, awful state. Oh! what a dreadful state I was in!



The chapel at Ryton where Sukey Harley first came under the sound of the Word. It was later converted into the chapel house.

“I thought I was going to hell, and I counted nine other women in the chapel that I thought would come with me. Those two, I thought, would go to heaven; they were for none of my company. This was what I was thinking, counting the people, putting them which I thought were for heaven, and which were for hell. Myself, I thought, was sure to go to hell, but I thought I had not yet done enough to go to hell. Then a dreadful thought came into my head: ‘I wonder if I can find Charles’s knife. Suppose I were to kill him, suppose I were to kill my child.’ Oh! I were in a dreadful, awful state that night at chapel.

“When we came out I got close behind those two women. I was afraid the clouds would fall down upon my head, I was just like a crazy thing. I heard the old woman say to the other, ‘O Nancy, Nancy, there’s some precious soul

called tonight.’ Ah! who should it be but me? Yet I knew it not. I said to myself, ‘What does that old Methodist fool mean?’ When I got home, I went into a very dismal, heartless way. I thought I was going to hell; where was the use of my praying any more? I was tempted to give in praying. I thought I should never know *their* God.

“Before I went to bed, I got into the dark corner, and, as usual, I began in my way to pray those words. I thought I felt the devil pulling me by the hair of the head, yet I held fast by the table. I was afraid to go to sleep that night. I thought I should tumble into hell, and that thought about Charles’s knife troubled me.

“On the Monday morning, while I was eating my breakfast (but I had no stomach to eat) - it was after Charles was gone to work, these words entered my mind, ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me’ (Revelation 3. 20). I said, ‘This is the text the man had for his sermon last night.’ Well, it was, but I had-na’ heard it then. I heard it now, though. All the words came quite plain into my heart. ‘Oh!’ I thought, ‘suppose it should be *THEIR* God at the door! Oh, how joyful I would get up and loose Him the door. Now,’ I thought, ‘I can ne’er give in praying, those words have so encouraged me.’

“I went up the ladder into my bedroom and began to pray. I made such a noise the folks might have heard me in the street. I was afraid I should frighten my child. I came down and looked at her - she was a little one eating her breakfast. I went up again and did not stop long. I came down again and filled the child’s bag with meat, and sent her off to school. I put her out at the door, and locked and bolted it. Then I said with all my strength, ‘I will never open this door again till I know *their* God.’ I stuffed the windows with all the old rags I could find; I could not bear the light. Then I went down on my knees in the dark corner and began praying these same words that I had used to do, the same words over and over and over again - the Lord’s prayer, and, ‘Lord, lead me into the true knowledge of Thy dear Son.’ I felt as if I would have pulled the roof over my head. I went tearing and tearing at it with such vehement earnestness.

“Well, who put that strong cry into my heart? Was it from myself? No; but He gave it me and forced me to cry out because it was His own blessed will to hear me and answer me. I felt Him come; it’s past my talking about. Such a wonderful time; it’s clean past telling. No words can express the feelings of my heart at this time. He fetched me off my knees, I started up. I cannot find

words to express the wonderful doings of that blessed moment. Well, this is part of it. He showed me all my sins that I had committed even from a child. Yes, that bit of pink ribbon I had stolen for my doll's cap came upon me. He showed me how for that one sin I might have been sent to hell, and He would have been just.

“Oh! He showed me my black desert, how I had deserved to go to hell, what a reprobate I had been, and how like a devil I had walked upon the earth, how I had angered Him with my sinfulness. My heavy sins and my vileness came upon me. Oh! He appeared such a holy God, such a heavenly, bright and glorious Being. Suppose He had said to me then at that awful moment, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed’ (Matthew 25.41), He would have been just, and to hell I must have gone.

“Oh! what a holy God mine is. Well, I was lost; I could-na’ tell what to do, lost in wonder, lost in surprise. Yet all this time He kept me from being frightened. I had been frightened, but not now; there was somewhat that held me from being frightened. He seemed to tell me all my sins were forgiven. I had such a sight inwardly of my dear Redeemer's sufferings, how He was crucified, how He hung on the cross for me. It was as if He showed me what I deserved, yet He seemed to say He had suffered that desert. It was as if He made it so plain to me, how that He would save me because it was His own blessed will to save me. It was as if He had shown me how He had chosen me from the foundation of the world. He would have mercy on me because He would have mercy.

“I never knew what sin was till now, but He showed me what it was, how black, how dreadful. I felt it was my just desert to go to hell. He would have been just and holy to send me there. I was so lost in wonder that I said, ‘O Lord Jesus Christ, make hell ten thousand times hotter before Thou sendest me there.’ These were my very words - I can tell the words, but the feeling I cannot tell. But He saved me till I was so overwhelmed that I did-na’ know what to do. I can truly say, since that blessed morning, I have a Saviour and a Redeemer, yes I have. Ever since that blessed time my dear and heavenly Father has kept me in His dear hands, and guided me and counselled me Himself.

“Well, I went and unblocked the windows, cleared away all the dirty rags, and let in the blessed light of the sun, the glorious light, my Father's light. I unbolted the door and opened it. I looked out: what a glorious sight! I saw my God in everything - the clouds, those clouds I had so often puzzled over, my God was in the clouds. The trees, the hedges, the fields, the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, showed me that I had a God. All things were new to me. I was unbound, I was loosed. Yes! I wondered at it.

“I went to old Nancy Smith’s door and looked in. I could not speak. She said, ‘Sukey, what’s the matter?’ I could make no answer. Off I ran to the other. I was enabled to tell her somewhat, but very little, I could not find words to express the goodness of God to me. I now understood and believed these words, ‘Ye must be born again’ (John 3.7).

“This blessed state continued a good while. I felt the happiest creature, the joyfullest woman on the face of the earth. My God enabled me from that very time to break loose from all my vain companions in the flesh. They thought it very hard, yes, and so did I too, but my heavenly dear Father called me out from them and I followed Him. I dared not do otherwise; I was set clean off at a distance from them. Ever since that blessed morning I have been a lone soul on the face of the earth, ‘a sparrow alone upon the house top’ (Psalm 102.7). I often think of that verse; it suits me.”

Learning to Read

“It was no great while after this, I had a desire to read. I longed to read the blessed Word for myself. I got my little wench to teach me the letters. She used to grow sleepy, so I would give her two suppers of a night to encourage her. All the while I was praying to my God to enable me to learn. She brought me on as far as this – God is love, God is light; and these very words came over me. When I spelt out the words, they came into my heart. I thought, ‘My God is love, He is light, He can teach me Himself.’

“I wanted no more teaching of Mary. From that time I would take my Book, and go down on my knees, and look up to my heavenly Father, and beg of Him to teach me. I used to spell out the words, and then look up to know how to call them. Oh! how I felt at these times. I can give no description of my feelings, but I had this confidence given me, that He would teach me to read His blessed Word. And He did teach me! It was surprising how He put the words into my mind and memory. Yes! I can truly say, ‘I have been taught by God.’ ”

Removal to Pulverbatch

“It was not long after this time that we removed to Pulverbatch, where we now live. It is now between twenty and thirty years since the blessed morning

of my conversion. My God has been with me all this time. I have known heavy seasons of sorrow, great darkness, bitter distress. I have been sorely tempted of Satan, and plagued with the corruptions of my own heart. Oh! what heavy temptations I have been under for days and days together. I have just sat still on my chair, tempted and buffeted of Satan. I have not had the least power to do one hand's turn for my own defence, a poor, helpless creature, a straitened, weary thing, sorely tempted to believe that I had sinned against the Holy Ghost. Oh! the fiery darts of the evil one, they have pierced my poor soul through and through.

“Yes, I know what sore temptations mean, yet in all this my God has been with me still. He has never left me nor forsaken me. No, He has never suffered me entirely to lose hold of that blessed hope, that blessed assurance, which He gave me that morning, that He had made me His child, and that He would save me. It is my God who teaches me to profit. It is He who comforts me. He sends down His Holy Spirit into my heart, and brings my dear Redeemer's sufferings to my remembrance. Then I can bear all. This is the thing that bears me up in the midst of all my sorrows.

“Oh! how He reveals my Saviour to me. Yes, I can truly say, ‘I have known Christ on earth. I have known Him from a Babe to a Man, crucified and slain for my sins, from the manger to the cross.’ The nails, the thorns, the spear – my sins pierced Him then. Oh! when He brings these things upon me, my hard heart is melted. Then I can mourn, the enemy is then vanquished. He shirks off; my Jesus comes into my soul. If Christ were not to come into my soul, what a devil and blundering heart here would be together. But this is the way my God leads me, and He has brought me to know it.

“He holds me down with the one hand, and lifts me up with the other. He chastens and cuts me with one hand, and strengthens and comforts me with the other. Oh! the tender mercies of my God to me. How He has revealed my Saviour to me! He blesses His Word to my soul, He corrects me, He chastens me in love, and He orders my way before Him and sends down His Holy Spirit to comfort me. Heaven is my home! Oh! bless and praise His holy Name for ever.”

CHAPTER 3

A LETTER FROM MR. BOURNE

This account was shown in manuscript to many friends, and amongst them to the late Mr. Bourne, then residing in London, but afterwards minister of the Gospel at Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire. He had heard of her before, and had made some inquiries respecting her, which had led to her dictating a letter to him, which will be found in the pages of this memoir. But, on reading the full account of her case as above detailed, he wrote to her as follows:

“London, Nov. 8th, 1836

“Dear Friend in the Lord,

“I have read your ‘Account’ with great delight, and sweet spiritual refreshment, and bless God for displaying His sovereign pleasure, in choosing out of a wicked world the least likely in all the village where you dwelt. You can never boast of your goodness or natural wisdom, but can with me say, ‘It is of His free mercy He has saved us, by the washing of regeneration.’ True enough, you could not find out how you were to be born again; yet you at last perceived that this spiritual wind blew where it listed, though you could not tell whence it came or whither it went: ‘So is every one that is born of the Spirit’ (John 3. 8).

“I was much encouraged by your description of the way the Lord taught you to read – is anything too hard for Him? No. This ought to encourage you and me to come boldly to a throne of grace with all our wants, and not (as we are so ready to do) go everywhere else. We have all a most foolish feeling that an arm of flesh can do wonders; but this is one thing the Lord will be continually striking at all our days; and will never cease to show us by various means that none but Jesus Christ can do helpless sinners good. How the Lord in all your ignorance instructed you agreeably to His written Word! There is no salvation for sinners but through Jesus Christ. This revelation was made known to you; and the Lord, the Spirit, put that prayer into your heart, ‘Lord, bring me into the true light and knowledge of Thy dear Son.’ This prayer was heard, and He came into your heart with all His saving benefits. Thus His coming drove out all other objects – all your fiddling, dancing, swearing, and all other vanities, the Lord cast into the depths of the sea of His love, and left you no desire to return to them. ‘What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now bitterly ashamed?’ What fruit? Misery and wretchedness was the fruit. But what fruit found you in the revelation of Jesus Christ to your soul? The fruit

was love, joy, peace, goodness, mercy, and many more fruits of the Spirit; which are always found when He has possession of the heart. And when we walk in the Spirit, and in the sweet enjoyment of these things, what a discovery by the Spirit we often find of the pride of the heart. These evil beasts will show their heads; that corrupt principle called the old man will often seek for the mastery, and fight for it too. And this is the reason the Lord tells us to endure hardness as good soldiers, and put on the whole armour of God, not our fleshly armour, but God's strength, which shall be made perfect in our weakness. So, my dear friend, when you are attacked by any of these evil beasts, and they bring on great fears, mind, with the fears, there are also many confessions and cries; and then your weakness will be manifest, and you will come to the right place where God sends this help, 'Let the weak say, I am strong.' This causes hope to abound and courage to increase, and we again press on, and Christ our Captain never leaves us, but leads us on to victory. May this be your happy lot, not to be discouraged because of the way; but rather look at the almighty arm of our blessed Redeemer, and see if we can 'sink with such a prop, that holds the world and. all things up.'

"From yours in the Lord,

"J. Bourne

"To Sukey Harley."