



Longacre Sc.

First printing: June 2011

Copyright © 2011 by Attic Books. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles and reviews.

For information write:

New Leaf Publishing Group, P.O. Box 726, Green Forest, AR 72638.
Attic Books is a division of the New Leaf Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-0-89051-620-1

Library of Congress Number: 2011905688

Printed in the United States of America

Please visit our website for other great titles: www.nlpg.com

Originally published in 1831 by:

American Sunday-School Union

Now known as:

American Missionary Fellowship

www.americanmissionary.org

ENTERED according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1831, by PAUL BECK, Jr. Treasurer, in trust for the American Sunday-school Union, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

THE
LIFE OF JOHN NEWTON,

RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF ST. MARY WOOL-
NOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

COMPILED FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION, AND
REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

AMERICAN SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION.

PHILADELPHIA:
NO. 146 CHESNUT STREET.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The ASSU, now called American Missionary Fellowship (AMF), has been associated with some of America's most prominent citizens and religious leaders. Included among ASSU officers or influenced by its mission were Bishop William White of Philadelphia's Christ Church; Bushrod Washington (President George Washington's nephew); Francis Scott Key, who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner"; D.L. Moody; Laura Ingalls Wilder; and John Adams (related to both early American presidents), who personally organized over 320 Sunday schools.

ASSU missionaries carried books published by the mission in saddlebags to leave with the fledgling Sunday schools they had started, promoting literacy, education, and the very best in Christian moral values. Though it stopped publishing books in 1968, American Missionary Fellowship continues its missionary work in the United States, extending beyond Sunday school work to include church planting, church camps, and numerous other programs.

<http://www.americanmissionary.org/>

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following memoir, compiled for the use of the American Sunday School Union, can pretend to no merit, but that of accuracy. It is taken from Newton's narrative of himself, and his memoirs by Mr. Cecil; and, so far from attempting any originality, the language of the narrative is adopted wherever it was practicable.

The object of this compilation is, to give the principal events of the life of Newton, in a more regular series than they have yet been presented to the public; and to put it in such a form as will render it easy to be obtained, and acceptable to youthful readers. If this be attained, its object will be accomplished.

THE
LIFE OF JOHN NEWTON.

CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHY is useful, by giving instruction in more minute particulars than history. In history, a vast group is presented, of which, the separate individuals, however distinguished, are but parts, and therefore make less impression on the mind. But biography presents a single portrait to the attention, and there is nothing to divert from a particular examination of its excellences and defects.

Few lives, perhaps, if accurately related, and especially if we have the means of examining the operations of the mind, and the motives of action, would be without useful lessons: but there are some so full of incident, and so remarkable in their circumstances, that they are highly interesting and instructive.

The subject of this work, was one of those who have experienced great variety of fortune ; at one time degraded to the lowest rank of human wretchedness,—at another elevated to a post of high respectability and usefulness : and his history allures to the practice of those virtues which secured the latter, while it warns against the indulgence of those evil propensities which produced the former. From it, also, we may learn, that no character, however degraded, is to be despaired of; though none should rely on it as authority to indulge in sin ; since hundreds are destroyed by such courses, where one is rescued. The power of God can reclaim the most hardened offender, but no one has a right to expect it will be exerted in his favour, if he persist in that which he knows to be wrong.

John Newton was born in London, the 24th of July, 1725, of respectable, though not wealthy parents. His father was, for many years, master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade, an occupation which necessarily kept him much away from home. His mother was a pious woman; and as John was her only child, her whole attention was directed to his

education. While he was very young, she herself taught him English with so much success, that when he was four years old he could read with propriety in any common book he met with. She also made him commit to memory, many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of scripture, the catechism, some hymns and poems; which he afterwards found very useful to him, from the effect they had upon his mind. He was, at that time, of a very mild temper, with little inclination for the noisy sports of children; and always best pleased to be in his mother's company, and to learn what she taught him. She had a great desire that he should enter the ministry; and with this view, intended to have sent him to college, in Scotland, when he became old enough. But his mother died before he was seven years old, and he was left to be brought up under very different management.

His father, who was absent at the time of his mother's death, did not come home until the following year. Soon after his return, he married again, and thus John passed into other hands. His step-mother treated him with kindness; but she was occupied with her

own children, who also attracted a large share of his father's attention, and John was allowed to follow his own course. Thus left to himself; he ran about the streets with idle and wicked boys, and soon learned their evil ways. Soon after his father's marriage he was sent to a boarding school, where he remained two years, but learned very little, for the master did not treat him well. He made some progress in Latin, but from the hasty manner in which he acquired it, soon forgot nearly all he had learned. When at home, his father, though he loved him, treated him with great sternness; so that John regarded him with more fear than affection; and this sternness of his father, joined with the severity of the school-master, injured his character, and nearly destroyed the good impressions of his mother's care. But his early lessons were not entirely lost; for he afterwards said, that they long restrained him from the practice of vice, and it was a great while before he could shake them off altogether.

The day John was eleven years old, he went on board of his father's ship; and from that time, till the year 1742, he made several

voyages ; not, however, pursuing this mode of life steadily, but frequently remaining on shore a considerable time, which was chiefly spent in the country. In his fifteenth year, he was placed, for a few months, at Alicant, in Spain, and had the prospect of settling in business there, with a merchant who was a friend of his father ; but his bad habits, and restless behaviour prevented this, and thus a favorable opportunity was lost.

During this period his temper and feelings had undergone several changes. While at school he had but little concern about religion, but was sometimes troubled with a sense of the sinfulness of his conduct ; and, as he was fond of reading, some impression was made on his mind, by pious books which came in his way. Under this influence, he attempted some reform, and was, for a time, very religious in his own conceit. But he soon became weary of this course, and gradually became worse than before : instead of prayer, he learned to curse and blaspheme, and was exceedingly wicked when out of his father's sight.

All this was before he was twelve years

old. About that time, he had a dangerous fall from a horse, which had nearly killed him, by throwing him within a few inches of a newly cut hedge-row : and, although he escaped without much injury, he was much alarmed by the danger he had been in, and the reflection that he might have been thus suddenly summoned to appear before God. For some time he broke off from his profane practices, and appeared quite altered ; but it was not long before he declined again.

At another time he was roused to reflection by the loss of an intimate companion. They had agreed to go together on board of a ship of war, one *Sunday* ; but Newton, providentially came too late : the boat, which was to have taken him, was upset, and his companion, with several others, was drowned. He was invited to the funeral of his play-fellow, and was exceedingly affected, to think that by the delay of a few minutes (which had very much displeased and fretted him till he saw the event,) his life had been preserved. However, this, likewise, was soon forgotten ; and notwithstanding his conscience sometimes troubled him, he continued to grow worse, until he

was, as he states, abandoned to almost every species of wickedness of which a boy could be guilty.

When in his fifteenth year, a great reform took place in his outward conduct, and he became very strict in his observance of the forms of religion. He spent a great part of the day in reading the scriptures, meditation and prayer : he fasted often, and long ; and would hardly answer a question, for fear of speaking an idle word. This state continued nearly two years. “But,” he says in his narrative, “it was a poor religion ; it left me, in many respects under the power of sin, and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless.”

Such was young Newton’s frame of mind, when, in the year 1742, his father, having retired from active life, was thinking how to settle him in the world, and wished him to engage in some business for himself. But John had no inclination to business, and instead of endeavouring to support himself, and become useful to society, he preferred a visionary scheme of life, a mixture of religion, philosophy, and indolence, very inconsistent with

any active occupation. At length, a merchant of Liverpool, an intimate friend of his father, proposed to send him, for some years to Jamaica; and promised to take care of his future fortune. To this, John consented; and every arrangement was made for the voyage, but the week before he was to have sailed, his father sent him on some business, near Maidstone, in the county of Kent; and this journey, which was intended to have occupied but two or three days, gave rise to circumstances which occasioned a total change in his feelings and prospects.

A few days before going to Kent, he received an invitation to visit a family residing in that county. They were distant relations, but intimate friends of his mother: she died in their house; but a coolness took place upon his father's second marriage, and John had had no communication with them for several years. As his road lay within half a mile of their house, he obtained his father's permission to visit them; but was so indifferent about it, that he sometimes thought of passing on without stopping. He, however, went; was immediately recognized, and received

with great kindness, as the child of a dear deceased friend. His friends had two daughters, the elder of whom, (as he learned some years afterwards,) had been intended, by their mothers, as his wife, without anticipating the events which afterwards occurred to render their union exceedingly improbable. Almost at the first sight of this girl, then under fourteen years of age, he was impressed with an affection for her, which exerted a great influence over his future life. This affection was romantic in the extreme, and though he soon lost all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrances of prudence and conscience, his regard for her, he declares, was always the same; and none of the scenes of misery and wickedness he afterwards experienced ever banished her from his thoughts.

This powerful feeling roused him from the stupid state of mind in which he had indulged, and led him to exertions he would probably not otherwise have made. Not wishing any longer to go to Jamaica for four or five years, and yet afraid to let his father know his change of intention, he remained in Kent three weeks, instead of three days, and did

not return to London, until the vessel in which he was to have gone, had sailed, and the opportunity was lost. His father was much displeased with his conduct; but soon became reconciled, and sent him with a friend, on a voyage to Venice. In this voyage he was exposed to the company and bad example of the common sailors, among whom he associated, and his religious habits yielded very much to their evil influence.

During this voyage, he had an extraordinary dream, which is very particularly related in his narrative; and, evidently, with a belief, that it was a direct warning from heaven. There is no doubt that many men of sound judgment believe that God reveals his will to mankind, in the present age, in dreams. That he did so in the early ages of the church is certain; but there should be very strong evidence to induce us to believe the fact of such revelations at the present day. It is, however, impossible to deny, that dreams, like other natural occurrences, may be the means, under God, of producing beneficial results; and where they have such a tendency they ought to be improved. With these remarks

we give Newton's dream, as related by himself; though we must add, that it does not appear to have had any beneficial effect on his future conduct, notwithstanding it made a strong impression on his mind at the time.

“The scene presented to my imagination was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me (I do not remember from whence) and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me, that while I preserved that ring I should be happy and successful: but, if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present, and the terms, willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and, observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues; and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness,

in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time, upon the impossibility of the thing ; and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal, but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt, and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropped it over the ship's side into the water, which it had no sooner touched than I saw, at the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of mountains (a part of the Alps,) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and that they were all in flames. I perceived, too late, my folly ; and my tempter, with an air of insult informed me, that all the mercy God had in reserve for me, was comprised in that ring, which I had wilfully thrown away. I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains, and that all the flames I saw were kindled on my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony ; so that it was surprising I did not then awake ; but my dream continued, and when I thought myself upon the point of a constrained departure, and stood self-condemned, without plea or

hope, suddenly, either a third person, or the same who brought the ring at first, (I am not certain which,) came to me, and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself wilfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness, and asked if I should be wiser, supposing I had my ring again. I could hardly answer to this, for I thought it was gone beyond recall. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it, and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him: the moment he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then, was 'the prey taken from the hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered.' My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again; but he refused to return it, and spoke to this effect: 'If you should be intrusted with this ring again, you would very soon bring yourself into the same distress; you are not able to keep it; but I will preserve it for you, and whenever it is

needful will produce it in your behalf.' Upon this I awoke, in a state of mind not to be described : I could hardly eat, or sleep, or transact my necessary business for two or three days ; but the impression soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it ; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again till several years afterwards."

Nothing very remarkable occurred in the following part of the voyage. He returned home in December 1743, and soon after repeated his visit to Kent ; where he protracted his stay in the same imprudent manner as before, so as again to disappoint his father's designs of settling him in Jamaica, and almost to provoke him to disown him. Before any thing like suitable employment offered again, his imprudence in wearing his common sailor-dress, attracted the notice of a press-gang, (men employed in England, to find sailors to serve on board of ships of war ; which they do by going about the streets and taking up any person whom they suppose to be a sailor, and carrying him by force on board some ship of war.) Young Newton was taken by

such a gang, and carried on board the Harwich man-of-war. It was a time of great danger; the French fleet was hovering on the coast of England, and seamen were much wanted: his father was therefore unable to procure his release: but in consequence of recommendations to the captain, he was promoted to be a midshipman.

He was thus placed in a situation where he might, by good conduct, have acquired respect, and perhaps, risen to eminence; but his mind was unsettled, and his behaviour such as prevented his further promotion. In this situation he met with companions who completed the ruin of his principles, and gradually prepared him for the evil courses in which he afterwards engaged. His chief acquaintance was a person of great natural talents and agreeable manners, but a zealous advocate of the principles of infidelity; who, taking advantage of the unsettled state of Newton's mind on the subject of religion, talked so much to him about objections and arguments against it, that he at length renounced the truth, and embraced the infidel opinions of his new friend. His future life, while he con-

tinued under the influence of these sentiments, is a striking commentary upon the folly, as well as the wickedness of those, who pretend to promote human happiness by removing the restraints, while they destroy the hopes contained in the gospel: and those who are inclined to adopt the principles of these pretended friends of liberal education, may here see the practical operation of their destructive system.

CHAPTER II.

THE ship in which Newton was thus placed, was ordered to the East Indies; and while she was preparing for the voyage, the captain gave him permission to go on shore for a day, which he very improperly abused by going a great distance, to pay a farewell visit to the young lady to whom he was so much attached. This detained him several days, and although the captain was prevailed upon to excuse his absence, yet he was highly displeased, and