

Autobiographies

by J.C. Philpot

Autobiography has a peculiar charm, especially when written in a vivid and original style, and is especially interesting to Christians who see the providential dealings of God in the lives of others.

Scripture: Psalm 139:1, Proverbs 16:9, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 2:10, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Providence Of God", "Personal Testimony"

Description

J.C. Philpot delves into the captivating nature of autobiographies, emphasizing the power of vivid storytelling and the ability to resonate with readers on a personal level. He highlights how shared experiences and hidden secrets in one's past can make autobiographies deeply engaging, especially for those whose lives have been touched by God's providential interventions. Philpot also explores the intertwining of providence and grace in life stories, showcasing how faith is strengthened by witnessing God's hand at work in the lives of His people.

Transcript

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What is called autobiography, that is, the life of a man written by himself, has always in it a peculiar charm, especially if the incidents recorded are striking, and the writer has the faculty, given to few, of presenting them in a clear, graphic, and vivid form. A heavy, dull, confused style may make the most remarkable incidents in action, wearisome in narration; and as we often see in our private communion with Christian people, the best experiences may be spoiled by the badness of telling them. No author has ever survived his own day who has not been gifted with a vivid, original, and life-like style, for what is wearisome to read is soon not read at all. Here Mr. Huntington peculiarly shines. He is never dull, never prosy, never commonplace, never confused, never unintelligible. The buoyancy of his style is remarkable, and bears his books and letters up so that they never become wearisome. Seasoned with heavenly salt, and enlivened with the most sprightly and original sallies of wit and humour, they possess a peculiar freshness, so that they become neither dry nor moldy.

But there is another reason why autobiography to most men has a peculiar charm. As God has fashioned our hearts alike, and as in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man, every reader seems to read more or less of his own history in the narrative of another. If we have not been in precisely the same,

we have been in similar circumstances, and, what he felt in such or such particular crises of his life, we have felt, if not with the same intensity, at like periods of our own history. There are few readers also in whose real life, or in whose waking dreams, if their actual history has been but commonplace, there has not been a tinge more or less marked of what, for lack of a better word, we may call romance.

There has been some blighted youthful love, or early bereavement of an almost adored object, or some deep-seated, unrequited affection, or some cruel desertion, or some violated trust. As the grey-headed and the middle-aged appear to our young folk, it never strikes their mind that these grave old fogies were once young, and that under their cold, as they think, bosom the fires of their youth still sleep under the ashes. It is these sleeping fires which autobiography stirs, and thus interests as deeply the old as the young.

Have you, aged reader, no secrets under that grave exterior which you carry? Had you no struggling childhood, or oppressed youth; no incidents never to be forgotten, in which you were a great sinner or a great sufferer? Now these passages in your past life, as they at the time stirred up the secret depths of your heart, have they not left behind indelible impressions which again and again recur, sometimes in your dreams when the buried past becomes a risen present, and sometimes in the thoughtful meditations of your waking mind, when, in a melancholy mood, you brood over the days that are forever gone!

How many things have we in times past said or done which we have kept buried in the silence of our own bosom! There are secrets which husband never tells to wife, nor wife to husband, daughter to mother, or sister to sister, brother to brother, or friend to friend. And as in many cases it would not be right or expedient to confess them, so would it be little else than treason against friendship and confidence to seek to extract them. And yet our inward consciousness that we have a history of our own makes the self-narrated history of another so interesting as often meeting us in those very points in which, concerning ourselves, we preserve a prudent silence.

If then, autobiography is interesting to all, how much more is the pleasure and interest of it increased to that heart where grace has set up its throne; and if our life history has been especially marked by providential interposition, how strengthening to faith it is to read of the providential dealings of God in a still more marked manner with others of his living family. The lines, too, of providence and grace are usually so blended together, or rather so closely interwoven, that, like a compact web, they mutually strengthen each other. The same God, who is a God of providence, is also a God of grace, and usually appears most conspicuously in the former as he deals more clearly in the latter. When faith is low, or when trials and afflictions do not abound, his providential hand is little seen; but as afflictions are sent, and faith is given with them, then once more the out-stretched hand of the Lord is seen and recognized.

Nor let any one either misunderstand or quarrel with our expression "romantic," even as applicable to religious biography. Look at the history of Jacob, or the history of Joseph, or the history of David. The love of Jacob for Rachel, the meeting of Joseph and his brethren in Egypt, the parting of David and Jonathan, when "they kissed one another and wept one with another--with David weeping especially hard." Cold must be the heart which does not respond even naturally to the life-like touches of these romantic incidents.

By romantic we do not mean anything connected with novels and romances--but those incidents of life which are distinct from mere commonplace events and stir up the deep feelings of the human heart. In this sense much, Huntington's "Bank of Faith" is truly romantic, and owes to it much of its beauty as well as its

popularity and charm. Something peculiar was stamped upon its author from the very first. His very birth--offspring, as he was of a double adultery, his starving childhood, his early yet, in its consequences, miserable and disgraceful love, his wanderings when he fled from the strong arm of justice in hunger and almost nakedness, his call by grace and his call to the ministry, with his persecutions and sufferings at the coal barge and the cobbler's stall--have not all these incidents, told by himself in his own inimitable style, thrown around him a peculiar halo which, if we call it romantic--we merely mean striking and removed from commonplace?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/autobiographies/>

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