

AN ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
BRAVERY AND HAPPY DEATH  
OF  
JAMES COVEY,  
*A BRITISH SEAMAN.*

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**M**R. Pratt, in the second volume of his "Gleanings," relates an affecting anecdote of a sailor on board the Venerable, the ship in which Admiral Duncan commanded the fleet in the action against the Dutch, off Camperdown. He received the account from Dr. Duncan, Lord Duncan's chaplain and relative, who, in the action, assisted the surgeon and his mate in binding up the wounds, and amputating the limbs, of the unfortunate sufferers. "A mariner," says the doctor, "of the name of Covey, was brought down to the surgery, deprived of both his legs: and it was necessary, some hours after, to amputate still higher. 'I suppose,' said Covey, with an oath, 'those scissars will finish the business of the ball, master mate?' 'Indeed, my brave fellow,' cried the surgeon, 'there is some fear of it.' 'Well, never mind,' said Covey, 'I have lost my legs, to be sure, and mayhap may lose my life; but,' continued he, with a dreadful oath, 'we have beat the Dutch!—we have beat the Dutch!—so I'll even have another cheer for it: Huzza! huzza!'"

This anecdote is rendered more interesting still, by some prior and subsequent circumstances attending this poor sailor. Covey was a good seaman, and was noticed among his shipmates for his intrepidity; but he was preeminent in sin as well as in courageous actions. About a fortnight before the English fell in with the Dutch fleet, he dreamed that they were in an engagement, in which both his legs were shot off, and that he was out of his mind. The dream made this courageous seaman tremble, and sometimes attempt to pray; but, not liking to retain God in his thoughts, he endeavoured to blot out the impression from his memory, and the recollection of his sins from his conscience, by drinking and blasphemous intercourse with the ship's



company. His efforts, however, were in vain. The thoughts of his sins, of God, and of death, harassed his mind day and night, and filled him with gloomy forebodings of what awaited him in this world and in the next, till the sight of the Dutch fleet, and their conversation with each other concerning the heroic achievements they should perform, dispelled the gloomy subject from his mind. As the two fleets were coming in action, the noble Admiral, to save the lives of his men, ordered them to lie flat on the deck, till, being nearer the enemy, their firing might do the more execution. The Dutch ships at this time were pouring their broadsides into the Venerable as she passed down part of the Dutch fleet, in order to break their line. This stout-hearted and wicked Covey, having lost all the impressions of his former reflections, heaped, in rapid succession, the most dreadful imprecations on the eyes, and limbs, and souls of what he called his cowardly shipmates, for lying down to avoid the balls of the Dutch. He refused to obey the order, till, fearing the authority of an officer not far from him, he in part complied, by leaning over a cask which stood near, till the word of command was given to fire. At the moment of rising, a bar-shot carried away one of his legs and the greater part of the other; but, so instantaneous was the stroke, though he was sensible of something like a jar in his limbs, he knew not that he had lost a leg till his stump came to the deck, and he fell. When his legs were amputated higher up, and the noise of the battle had ceased, he thought of his dream; and expected, that as one part of it was fulfilled, the other would be so too. Indeed, considering the pain of amputating and dressing both legs, and the agitation of his mind from fearing the full accomplishment of his dream, it appears next to a miracle that he retained his reason in the most perfect state: but this was to be explained to him at a future period. Some time after, he came out of Haslar Hospital, capable of walking by means of two wooden legs and two crutches; but his spirits were sorely dejected, from fearing that as his sins had brought upon him the judgment of God in the loss of his limbs, they would bring upon him the loss of his reason, and the loss of his soul.

Having heard of Orange Street Chapel, Portsea, he came on the first Sabbath evening after his leaving the hospital. The text that evening was Mark v. 15, "And they come to



Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind " The minister represented this demoniac as a fit emblem of sinners in general ; but especially of those who live without rule and order, drunkards, blasphemers, and injurious to themselves, and others ; but his sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind, as an engaging representation of the sinner converted to God by the gospel, made sensible of the evil of sin, the value of his soul, and the necessity of salvation through a crucified Redeemer ; enjoying peace of mind, having fellowship with Christ and his people submitting to the authority of the Scriptures, and receiving instructions from Christ the Friend of sinners. Covey listened with attention and surprise ; wondered how the minister should know him among so many hundred people, or who could have told him his character and state of mind. His astonishment was still more increased, when he found him describe, as he thought, the whole of his life and even his secret sins. He could not account for it, why a minister should make a sermon all about him, a poor wooden-legged sailor. His sins, being brought afresh to his mind, filled him with horrors tenfold more gloomy than before. Despair, for some minutes, took a firm hold on his spirits ; and he thought he was now going out of his mind, should die, and be lost ; till the minister declared Jesus Christ was as willing to save the vilest of sinners, as he was to relieve this poor creature possessed of the devil, and that this man was restored to his right mind when he believed in him. He now began to understand the true interpretation of his dream. He thought he had been out of his mind all his life, and that to love and serve Jesus Christ would be a restoration to his right senses again. He was now almost overwhelmed with pleasure. While hearing of the astonishing love of Jesus Christ to sinners, hope took the place of despair, and joy of grief and horror ! Those eyes which had never shed a tear when he lost his legs, nor when the shattered parts of his limbs were amputated, now wept in copious streams, flowing from strong sensations of mingled joy and sorrow !

Some weeks after this, he called and related to me the whole of his history and experience. He was surprised to find that I had never received any information about him at the time the sermon was preached, which so exactly met his



case. Something more than twelve months after this time, he was received a member of our church, having given satisfactory evidences of being a genuine and consistent Christian. A few weeks since, hearing he was ill, I went to visit him. When I entered his room, he said, "Come in, thou man of God! I have been longing to see you, and to tell you the happy state of my mind. I believe I shall soon die: but death now has no terrors in it. The sting of death is sin, but, thanks be to God, he has given me the victory through Jesus Christ. I am going to heaven! O! what has Jesus done for me, one of the vilest sinners of the human race!"—A little before he died, when he thought himself within a few hours of dissolution, he said, "I have often thought it was a hard thing to die, but now I find it a very easy thing to die. The presence of Christ makes it easy. The joy I feel from a sense of the love of God to sinners, from the thought of being with the Saviour, of being free from a sinful heart, and of enjoying the presence of God for ever, is more than I can express! O how different my thoughts of God, and of myself, and of another world, from what they were when I lost my precious limbs on board the Venerable! It was a precious loss to me! If I had not lost my legs, I should perhaps have lost my soul!"—With elevated and clasped hands, and with eyes glistening with earnestness, through the tears which flowed down his face, he said, "O, my dear minister, I pray you, when I am dead, to preach a funeral sermon for a poor sailor; and tell others, especially sailors, who are as ignorant and as wicked as I was, that poor blaspheming Covey found mercy with God, through faith in the blood of Christ! Tell them, that since I have found mercy, none that seek it need to despair. You know better than I do what to say to them! But oh! be in earnest with them; and may the Lord grant that my wicked neighbours and fellow-sailors may find mercy as well as Covey!"—He said much more; but the last words he uttered were "Hallelujah! Hallelujah." J. G.

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