

## Memoirs of Joshua Marsden.

Joshua Marsden, the subject of the following memoir, was born near Liverpool, in the Kingdom of Great-Britain, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1757. His father was the oldest branch of a respectable family, that gave name to the town of Marsden, in Yorkshire. His mother was of Scottish descent, & was born at Dalkeith, near Edinburgh. It appears that his parents, or rather his father, for want of economy, had nearly run through the whole of a handsome patrimony, which was inherited from his great father, so that at the time of his birth, they were in indigent circumstances. Neither his father nor mother were truly religious; the former had a nominal attachment to the church of England, & the latter, only some few relics of early Presbyterian regularity. She was nevertheless a friend to Religion, & paid a partial attention to the morals of her children. From the earliest stages of infancy, (Mr. Marsden himself tells us) his conscience was tender. He had fear of doing wrong; which was sometimes so frequently increased by a variety of alarming dreams of the day of judgement. A thousand times, he was terrified with horrid apprehensions that devils were carrying him away. He felt a continual fear of death, under the dismal apprehension that he would go down to eternal misery; nay so strongly & lively were the images of woe, pictured on his mind, that he was afraid of dark-



asp. & often lay trembling in bed, lest the day of Judgement should take place before morning. Those chapters in the Gospels relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, he would read with the the deepest anxiety, & all those to him solemn & mysterious woes, the women grinding at the mill; the abomination of desolation; the flight in the winter; the two men in one bed & the days being shortened, he combined with the day of Judgement, which <sup>his</sup> fear struck fancy pre-imagined would take place during <sup>his</sup> life-time. "A knowledge of the evil of sin", says he, "appears to have been coeval with my understanding". Here we see the necessity of parents attending to the spiritual welfare of their children. We presumed ~~there~~ <sup>there</sup> is no child who has been bred in a land like ours, is entirely destitute of those feelings which young Marsden ~~had~~ felt, & if their parents would make the inquiry, & direct it to the Saviour of the world, who when upon earth said suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven, perhaps many a young soul would be brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is no particular period fixed time in the life of man, when the years of accountability commenced, but it just depends upon the opportunities one has enjoyed. We may sometimes find the mind of a child 12 years old, as much expanded as that of an adult.

With regard to his education, it was not possible for his parents situated as they were, to give him more than a common school tuition; and even this was almost in vain: not so much from the inability of the masters under whom he was placed, as the fatal necessity of being in company with bad boys of every description. Hence except under the look of the schoolmaster, he paid but little attention to either book, pen, or slate. He often absented himself from school, that he might plunge into the stream, rob the innocent bird of her young, or stroll about in the fields & woods with other wicked & truant boys. Going to school was a mere drudgery to him. He neither loved study, nor confinement. It is true he delighted to read voyages, travels, adventures, romances, and so on; but alas! he little knew the value of the privileges he enjoyed. Several times, during his early years, the Lord delivered him from imminent dangers, which ~~we~~ time will not permit us to mention. He was now familiar with the first stages of a life of finished iniquity, and wanted little but the finish of infidelity to make the picture complete. To his mother, the best of parents, as he confesses, he was shockingly disobedient: to such a degree, that he often used insulting language, & refused to comply with the most reasonable requests. Yet amidst all this profanity, his heart was not entirely destitute of religious feeling. God's holy Spirit had not ceased to strive with him. Sometimes in secret he was deeply grieved



at the recollection of his conduct; but Satan would <sup>not</sup> allow  
his votary to reflect. Nevertheless, every <sup>new</sup> step in wickedness  
was a kind of violence offered to his conscience, which ever  
and anon rang such a clavis in the ear of his soul, as  
made him, if possible, more miserable than he had made  
himself will. At last the hour arrived when he must be  
punished for his wickedness, and beaten with his own rod.  
Perhaps this was as good a punishment, as the reacting  
Providence of God could have brought upon him; & as it seem-  
ed to grow out of his sin, he could read the hand writing  
upon the wall, in the midst of his difficulties.

He had often threatened his pious mother, (for she was now  
an humble follower of Christ, having ~~through~~ <sup>after</sup> much  
agony of soul, & distress with regard to her eternal sal-  
vation, experienced the love of God shed abroad in her heart,  
that he would go to sea, & had several times left home with  
the full intention of going a voyage to the coast of Guinea.  
His restless mind & roving disposition burned with im-  
patience to see foreign climes. Some of his companions  
had gone & when they returned, boasted of what  
they had seen. Being now about 18 years of age, he  
resolved to take to sea, & engaged as a sailor on  
board the frigate *Amethyst*, then preparing to cruise  
against her old masters. Here he had an opportunity  
of contemplating a complete collection of rebels &  
gainst God & piety, from the captain to the  
cabin boys. It is not a random, or harsh expression

says he, that such a man of war is a floating hell.  
Their station was to cruise off the coast of France, peep  
into the French harbours, & annoy their trade as much  
as possible. They continued in company with other frigates,  
in this career till December, 1796, when they put into  
Torbay for wood & water. They sailed on the 28th. of the  
same month, & the following evening were overtaken with a  
severe gale of wind, which continued through a dark &  
dismal a night, as was perhaps ever experienced. A  
part of the first watch, were allowed to be below,  
*Spangherorden* lay down in his hammock, & immediately  
started up with the terrific dream that the ship had  
struck upon a rock. At 3 o'clock in the morning  
this presentiment was realized; they were then going  
before the wind, which was blowing a gale, the sky  
thick & raining, & the roaring of the waves horrible;  
the vessel with close reefed topsails was dashing  
rapidly through the foam, & as she descended on  
sea, struck with a most tremendous crash upon  
a reef. O how must that shock have pierced all  
on board! Instantly all was confusion, solicitude,  
& despair. The night dimly dark, the wild  
wind roaring furiously, the sea all in a foam,  
& our gallant ship dashing upon the rocks for-  
med a scene of sublimity & terrible distress. Ah,  
what a change was this from the preceding  
day. ere then was mirth, riot, & drunkenness;  
but death - inexorable death now stared this



wretched crew in the face. Even the profane boat-  
swain (it was said a profane one never lived in  
the suburbs of bottomless pit) cried in a most piteous  
& lamentable manner, "Lord have mercy upon me,  
we are all lost." Whence is it, that in times of  
danger, the ~~mind~~ human heart naturally  
turns to God, as its only refuge? & for even  
mariners, who are often the profane & most  
atheistical of beings, will then call upon God,  
& thus acknowledge his power over the elements,  
his omnipresence, & his providence. Perhaps it  
is the natural tendency of adversity, to drive us to  
take refuge in the arms of a being possessed of un-  
erring wisdom, communicative goodness & bound-  
less power. But to proceed —

In the midst of their calamity, when they had  
reason to fear that every moment would  
be their last, a tremendous surge lifted them  
over the ledge, & they were once more rested on  
the bosom of the waves; if that could be any con-  
solation in a sinking ship on a stormy sea  
& surrounded with darkness & tempest.

When the carpenter sounded the bells, his  
report was hardly less dismal than the death-  
warrant of a criminal, who has been just  
looking for a reprieve. The chains & hand  
pumps were all manned with <sup>an</sup> alacrity

that promised we should not go to the bottom if  
labour could prevent it; but every effort to gain  
upon the water, was in vain; it prevailed, & the ship  
appeared to be sinking very fast, as the water was  
in the hold nearly up to the combings of the hatch-  
way. Sails were let down under the bows to try to  
stop the leak. The guns, anchors, & boats, were all  
thrown over-board, save one of each. Fresh  
vigour seemed to inspire every exertion; and  
many were employed in bailing the water from  
the hatch-way. The moments appeared as hours,  
& dismal anxiety was depicted upon every face.  
As for our hero, he gave up every thing for lost, and while  
not employed in pumping heaved with his head upon a part  
of the vessel: the horrors of his situation, fell upon his  
spirit like black clouds. He could not pray; the heavens  
appeared like brass. Ah he would now have given  
millions of worlds for to have had one hope of mercy.  
He petrified, so to speak, & had scarcely any feeling,  
but of the deepest misery. In this state of mind, he  
continued till the <sup>3<sup>rd</sup></sup> welcomed appearance of light. It  
was not supposed that the ship would survive more  
than an hour longer; every lurch brought her  
deeper in the water, & every wave seemed commissioned  
to engulf them in the bowels of the deep; when to  
their insupportable satisfaction, the man aloft saw  
the island of Alderney, & the French coast of Normandy,  
rocky palaces, but there was some prospect of their



stick<sup>ing</sup> on some of them, & have at least a remote chance of their lives. They therefore stered towards them with the desperate intention of going running themselves upon the nearest reef, let the risque of going to pieces be ever so great; it was at least as safe an alternative as going to the bottom. The pilot knowing the island, carried the sinking frigate as clear of the rocks as possible, till within half a mile of the shore, when the swell of a mighty billow carried her with terrible impetuosity upon a hidden reef. Our hero being upon the main deck, when a tremendous wave rushed over the fore-castle, & knowing he should be swallowed up, made a desperate leap, & got hold upon the boom & spars; & thus by the mercy of God was saved from a dismal fate. After great distress & difficulty, they were taken from their awful situation by the inhabitants of the island, & brought safe ashore. Young Marsden after being in the island a few days, got on board a smuggling vessel, where he was stowed in a little hole under the fore-castle for fear of discovery, & in due time arrived at Lynn in Dorsetshire. He remained here a year, & had nearly forgotten all sense of Religion; during the summer he shipped himself in a large cutter that traded to Wales, & now thought he would again give himself up to a seafaring life. But after making a few trips to Wales in his new employ, he met with a circumstance, that finally, under God,

was the means of breaking him from the ocean. Suffice it to say he was shipwrecked. He however through the mercy of God was spared to see land again. After passing through Pembrokeshire, part of Cardiganshire, Merionethshire, & Denbighshire, he arrived at Chester. Upon a seafaring life being Mr. Marsden's own words; "The life of a sailor," says he, "is a life of woe. It is true he is bold & cheerful, but then he is thoughtless, profane, & desperate. His song, his bumper & his girl form his trio of pleasure. He rarely thinks, seldom reads, & never prays". &c. His return home, & interview with his dear mother was affectionate & joyful, but this soon gave place to anxiety. There were marines in town & their understanding he had been at sea, wished to take a liking to him. However the apprehensions of his friends as the result proved were groundless. At the request of an old acquaintance, Mr. Marsden went to meeting, church, which was quite an uncommon thing for him. The text was, "Whoso covereth his sins, shall suddenly not prosper, but he that confesseth, & forsaketh them shall find mercy." This sermon Mr. Marsden tells us was the means in the hands of God of awakening him from the dull slumber of sin in which he was until that time indulging. He left off singing profane songs, & other sinful practices: and his soul breathed & struggled continually for vital hope, & divine peace. He ventured to accept an invitation, to a not public meeting. He looked with singular veneration upon the



leader. I thought the meeting truly & impressively solemn: his mind was greatly affected, & the tears trickled down his cheeks, like rivulets. He attended all the means of Grace; & these on many occasions gave him sweet glimpses of the divine drawings toward the Lord Jesus. Sometimes he would give up all for lost, & sink into despondency & dryness. His greatest desire, was to feel more humble & more contrite, & dead to the world. And so the narrative proceeds, giving most discrediting accounts of the state of his mind. (which we regret time can not permit us to mention) until on Whit Sunday 1798. he went to Manchester, there under the preaching of Mr. Geyser — he was brought to see Saviour in all his loveliness. The dark clouds of unbelief vanished from his mind. He felt power to lay hold on Christ by faith. His Burden fell off — even his body felt the divine influence, & his lips were now filled with praise & his eyes with tears of grateful love. When looking forward to prospective holiness, he would often reflect, what state of life, would be most favorable to a continuance & security in piety; and none appeared to him so truly eligible, as the ministry of the Gospel. And upon the following views he grounded his desire to engage. 1. As a holy employment, He should be always serving God. 2. As a delightful employment. How agreeable are

the tabernacles, & Lord. At day spent in thy courts is better than a thousand." 3. As a useful employment. 4. As a congenial employment. He should enjoy more opportunities of reading, study, & improvement. 5. As an honorable employment. The ministers of Jesus Christ appeared to him as the excellent of the earth. He frequently exhorted, & held prayer meetings, when occasion offered & was finally induced by a private minister to enter the pulpit, when he preached from Num. xxii. 38. The exercise was with fear & trembling. He had to support himself by holding fast the pulpit, & was so much disconcerted that he resolved to venture no more. Through prayer, much perseverance however he obtained to considerable eminence as a preacher of the word of God. He now felt an earnest desire to be given up to the work of the ministry & also a wish to carry the gospel into foreign lands. He thought, that a mission required fewer abilities, than a home station. Though since, he says, that from thirteen years experience, he is persuaded that the reverse of this is the case. In the year 1799. Mr. Wm. Black, superintendent of the Nova Scotia & New Brunswick, came to England to solicit missionaries from the Conference for that portion of British North America. Mr. Marsden's mind was strongly drawn out to offer himself as a missionary on this occasion, and after some deliberation & prayer for direction, he wrote to Mr. Black; who requested him to meet him at Manchester, in order to con-



referred the subject: at which time it was agreed that Mr. B. should lay it before the Conference, that was to meet in London in the year 1808. The Conference complied with Mr. Black's request, & appointed him to labour as a Missionary <sup>in</sup> Nova Scotia, under the immediate direction of Dr. Thomas Coke as general Superintendent of all the Conference Missions. He sailed about the 24. of August in the Snow Sparrow Captain Humbels, for Halifax, where they arrived the 4. of October, after a passage of six weeks. Nothing particular happened to him, with the exception, of his very narrowly escaping destruction by two large sharks, as he with some others were swimming alongside the vessel. At Halifax, he was very received with every mark of gladness. The circuit appointed him was that part of Nova Scotia which included the boundary line of the Province of New Brunswick: the land being indented by the bay of Fundy on the one side, & the gulf of St. Lawrence on the other, may very properly be called the isthmus of Nova Scotia. After remaining at Halifax short time, he set off for his circuit, where the people having no preacher received him singular satisfaction. Mr. Marsden had contracted a very severe cold, & having gone out to preach one evening, he became much worse. The next day being very unwell, he took to his room: but after a week's confinement, he again ventured out to preach & came home with a violent fever.

He had now to take to bed in good earnest, to which & his room, he was confined 8 weeks. But during his affliction he had such a display of the power of Religion, as is beyond human language to describe. Such sweet communion with God - Such soul-quickening manifestations of his love, as exceeded all his ideas of spiritual enjoyment. His room, says he, was an Eden, & his bed appeared to be the porch of heaven. After he was sufficiently recovered, he resumed his labours. On this circuit Mr. Marsden, was much exposed to the inclemency of the weather: having sometimes to travel through rain, snow & cold, until nature was almost exhausted. But notwithstanding all his difficulties we have reason to believe, that he was the instrument in the hands of God, in the conversion of many souls from darkness to light. After having laboured on different circuits here for 79, 8 years (during which time he was married) he was appointed a missionary to the Bermuda islands. One reason of his removal to this place, was for the benefit of his health, which was now much impaired. Bermuda consists of a number of small islands lying in latitude about 32. The whole together about 3 miles in circumference. It appears that Conference had some time previous made some attempts to in 1799, appointed Rev. John Stevenson a missionary to the island, but when Mr. Stevenson



arrived, he was violently opposed, even by gov-  
ernment. A law was passed persecuting any person  
to preach, hold prayer meetings & any thing of the  
kind, ~~but~~ he belonged to the church of England.  
Mr. J. was imprisoned, tried, & confined 6  
months in prison, & fined 60 pounds. He fi-  
nally left the island, & returned to England.

Mr. Marsden was aware of this & dreaded the un-  
dertaking of the mission under such unfavour-  
able circumstances. Yet in the name of the Lord, he  
commenced. It was some time, before much good  
was likely to be effected. But after a residence  
of about 4 years he succeeded in erecting  
a chapel & calling together a tolerably large  
congregation. ~~He~~ Having an increasing family  
& finding that the mission would suit a  
young man better, he made known his mind  
to the conference, when another was appointed in  
his place. So having settled his affairs, he  
left the island, on the 11. of April 1812. he embarked  
for New York on his way to England. But  
on account of war between G. Britain &  
the United States he could not get off, immediately.  
And here our narrative ends.