

~Other Speakers S-Z: Alexander Whyte:

'That famous saint, the Lady Robertland, and the rare outgates she so often got.'—Livingstone's Characteristics.

The Lady Robertland ranks in the Rutherford sisterhood with Lady Kenmure, Lady Culross, Lady Boyd, Lady Cardoness, Lady Earlstoun, Marion M'Naught and Grizel Fullarton. Lady Robertland, like so many of the other ladies of the Covenant, was not only a woman of deep personal piety and great patriotism, she was also, like Lady Kenmure, Lady Boyd, and Marion M'Naught, a woman of remarkable powers of mind. For one thing, she had a fascinating gift of conversation, and, like John Bunyan, it was her habit to speak of spiritual things with wonderful power under the similitude and parable of outward and worldly things. At the time of the famous 'Stewarton sickness' Lady Robertland was of immense service, both to the ministers and to the people. Robert Fleming tells us that the profane rabble of that time gave the nickname of the Stewarton sickness to that 'extraordinary outletting of the Spirit' that was experienced in those days over the whole of the west of Scotland, but which fell in perfect Pentecostal power on both sides of the Stewarton Water.

'I preached often to them in the time of the College vacation,' says Robert Blair, 'residing at the house of that famous saint, the Lady Robertland, and I had much conference with the people, and profited more by them than I think they did by me; though ignorant people and proud and secure livers called them "the daft people of Stewarton."' The Stewarton sickness was as like as possible, both in its manifestations and in its results, to the Irish Revival of 1859, in which, when it came over and awakened Scotland, the Duchess of Gordon, another lady of the Covenant, acted much the same part in the North that Lady Robertland acted in her day in the West. Many of our ministers still living can say of Huntly Lodge, 'I resided often there, and preached to the people, profiting more by them than they could have done by me.'

Outgate is an old and an almost obsolete word, but it is a word of great expressiveness and point. It bears on the face of it what it means. An outgate is just a gate out, a way of redemption, deliverance and escape. And her rare outgates does not imply that Lady Robertland's outgates were few, but that they were extraordinary, seldom matched, and above all expectation and praise. Lady Robertland's outgates were not rare in the sense of coming seldom and being few; for, the fact is, they filled her remarkable life full; but they were rare in the sense that she, like the Psalmist in Mr. James Guthrie's psalm, was a wonder unto many, and most of all unto herself.

But a gate out, and especially such a gate as the Lady Robertland so often came out at, needs a key, needs many keys, and many keys of no common kind, and it needs a janitor also, or rather a redeemer and a deliverer of a kind corresponding to the kind of gate and the kind of confinement on which the gate shuts and opens. And when Lady Robertland thought of her rare outgates—and she thought more about them than about anything else that ever happened to her—and as often as she could get an ear and a heart into which to tell them, she always pictured to her audience and to herself the majestic Figure of the first chapter of the Revelation. She often spoke of her rare outgates to David Dickson, and Robert Blair, and John Livingstone, and to her own Stewarton minister, Mr. Castlelaw, whose name written in water on earth is written in letters of gold in heaven.

'Not much of a preacher himself, he encouraged his people to attend Mr. Dickson's sermons, and he often employed Mr. Blair to preach at Stewarton, and accompanied him back and forward, singing psalms all the way.' Her ladyship often told saintly Mr. Castlelaw of her rare outgates, and always so spoke to him of the Amen, who has the keys of hell and of death, that he never could read that chapter all his days without praising God that he had had the Lady Robertland and her rare outgates in his sin-sick parish.

But it is time to turn to some of those special and rare outgates that the Amen with the keys gave to His favoured handmaiden, the Lady Robertland; and the first kind of outgate, on account of which she was always such an astonishment to herself, was what she would call her outgate from providential disabilities, entanglements, and embarrassments.

She was wont to say to William Guthrie, who best understood her witty words and her wonderful history, that the wicked fairies had handicapped her infant feet in her very cradle. She could use a freedom of speech with Guthrie, and he with her, such as neither of them could use with Livingstone or with Rutherford. Rutherford could not laugh when his heart was breaking, as Lady Robertland and the witty minister of Fenwick were often

overheard laughing. 'Yes, but your Ladyship has won the race with all your weights,' Guthrie would laugh and say. 'One of my many races,' she would answer, with half a smile and half a sigh; but I have a long race, many long races, still before me. It seemed conclamatum est with me,' she would then say, quoting a well-known expression of Samuel Rutherford's, which is, being interpreted, It's all over and gone with me, 'but Providence, since the Amen took it in hand, has a thousand and more keys wherewith to give poor creatures like me our rare outgates.'

There were few alive by that time who had known Lady Robertland in her early days, and she seldom spoke of those days; only, on the anniversary of her early marriage, she never forgot her feelings when her life as a Fleming came to an end and her new life as a Robertland began.

There was a famous preacher of her day who sometimes spoke familiarly of the 'keys of the cupboard, that the Master carried at His girdle,' and she used sometimes to take up his homely words and say that she had had all the sweetest morsels and most delicate dainties of earth's cupboard taken out from under lock and key and put into her mouth. 'He ties terrible knots,' she would say, just to have the pleasure of loosing them off from those He loves. He lays nets and sets traps only that He may get a chance of healing broken bones and setting the terrified free.' No wonder that Wodrow calls her 'a much-exercised woman,' with such ingates and outgates, and with such miracles of an interposing Providence filling her childhood, her youth, her married and her widowed life. The Analecta is full of remarkable providences, but Lady Robertland's exercises and outgates are too wonderful even for the pages of that always wonderful and sometimes too awful book.

'My Master hath outgates of His own which are beyond the wisdom of man,' writes Rutherford, in her own language, to Lady Robertland from 'Christ's prison in Aberdeen.' Rutherford's letters are full of more or less mysterious allusions to the rare outgates that God in Christ had given him also from the snares and traps into which he had fallen by the sins and follies of his unregenerate youth. Whatever trouble came on Rutherford all his days—the persecution of the bishop, his banishment to Aberdeen, the shutting of his mouth from preaching Christ, the loss of wife and child, and the poignant pains of sanctification—he gathered them all up under the familiar figure of a waled and chosen cross. 'Seeing that the sins of my youth deserved strokes, how am I obliged to my Lord, who, out of many possible crosses, hath given me this waled and chosen cross to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. Since I must have chains, He has put golden chains on me. Seeing I must have sorrow, for I have sinned, O Preserver of mankind, Thou hast waled and selected out for me a joyful sorrow—an honest, spiritual, glorious sorrow. Oh, what am I, such a rotten mass of sin, to be counted worthy of the most honourable rod in my Father's house, even the golden rod wherewith the Lord the Heir was Himself stricken. Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Rutherford also was forgiven, and the only vengeance that God took of his inventions, the irregularities of his youth, was taken in the form of a 'waled cross.' 'I might have been proclaimed on the crown of the causey,' says Rutherford, 'but He has so waled my cross and His vengeance that I am suffering not for my sin but for His name.'

What a life hid with Christ in God he must live, who, like Rutherford, takes all his trials on earth as a transmuted and substituted cross for his sins: and who is able to take all his deserved and demanded chastisements in the shape of inward and spiritual and sanctifying pain. O sweet vengeance of grace on our sinful inventions! O most intimate and most awful of all our secrets, the secrets of a love-waled, love-substituted cross! O rare outgate from the scorn of the causeway to the smelting-house of 'Him who hath His fire in Zion!'

'The sorrows of death compassed me,' sings the Psalmist, and 'the pains of hell gat hold upon me; 'found trouble and sorrow.' What, you may well ask, were those pains of hell that gat such hold of David while yet he was a living and unreprobated man? Was it not too strong language to use about any earthly experience, however terrible, to call it the pains of hell? Ask that man whose sin has found him out what he thinks the pains of hell were in David's case, and he will tell you that remorse—unsoftened, unsweetened, unquenchable remorse—is hell; at any rate, it is hell upon earth; and till he confessed his sin it was David's hell. Sin taken up and laid by God's hand on the sinner's conscience, that makes that sinner's conscience hell. And, then, do we not read that Jehovah laid on our Surety the sin of us all till He was three hours in hell for us, and came out of it, as Rutherford says, with the keys of hell at His proud girdle? And it is with those captured keys that He now unlocks the true hell-gate in every guilty sinner's conscience.

'He comes the prisoners to relieve
In Satan's bondage held;

The gates of brass before Him burst,
The iron fetters yield.
We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.
There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in.'
'Myself am hell,' cried out Satan, in his agony of pride and rage and remorse.

'Divines and dying men may talk of hell,
But in my heart her several torments dwell.'

So you say of yourself, as you well may, after such a life as yours has been. The Judge of all the earth would not be a just judge unless hell were already kindled in your heart. But He who is a just God is also a Saviour, and He has with His own hand hung the key of hell and of your self-made bed in it at the girdle of Jesus Christ. Go to Him to-night, and tell Him that you are in hell. Tell Him that, like David, and very much, so far as you can understand, for David's sins, you, too, are in the pains of very hell. Cast yourself, like John in the Revelation, at His feet, and see if He does not say to you what He said through Nathan to David, and what He said Himself to John, and what He said to Lady Robertland, and what He said to Samuel Rutherford. Cast yourself at His feet, and see if you do not get at His hands as rare an outgate and as wonderfully waled a cross as the very best of them got.

Then all the rest of your life on this prison-house of an earth will be a history in you and to you of all kinds of rare outgates. For, once He who has the keys has taken your case in hand, He will not let either rust or dust gather on His keys till He has opened every door for you and set you free from every snare. There are many evil affections, evil habits, and evil practices that are still closely padlocked both on your outward and your inward life that you must be wholly delivered from. And He who has all the keys of your body and your soul too at His girdle, will not consider that you have got your full outgate, or that He has at all discharged His duty by you, till, as Rutherford says, your sinful habits and practices are all loosened off from your life and are driven back into the inner world of your inclinations; and then, after that, He will only take up still more skilful and still more intricate keys wherewith to turn the locks of delight, desire, and inclination. O blessed keys of hell and of death, of habit and inclination and evil affection! O blessed people who are under such a Redeemer from sin and death and hell! O truly famous saint, the Lady Robertland, who got so many and so rare outgates from the Amen with the keys!

Who shall give me an outgate from this body? cries the great apostle, not chafing in his chains for death, but for the true life that lies beyond death. Paul, with all his intense love of life and service—nay, because of that intense love—felt sometimes that this present life at its very best was but a life of relaxed imprisonment rather than of true liberty. Paul was, as we say, a kind of first-class misdemeanor, as Samuel Rutherford also was in his prison-palace in Aberdeen, and the Lady Robertland in Stewarton House; they had a liberty that was not to be despised; they had light and air and exercise; they were not in chains in the dungeon; they had pen and ink; they had books and papers, and their friends might on occasion visit them. They might have better food also if they paid for it; and, best of all, they could, till their full release came, beguile and occupy the time in work for Christ and His Church. But still they were present in this body of sin and death, and absent from the Lord, and they pined, and, I fear, sinfully murmured sometimes, for the last and the greatest and the best outgate of all.

'As for myself,' writes Rutherford,, I think that if a poor, weak, dying sheep seeks for an old dyke, and the lee-side of a hill in a storm, I surely may be allowed to long for heaven. I see little in this life but sin, and the sour fruits of sin; and oh! what a burden and what a bitterness is sin! What a miserable bondage it is to beat the nod of such a master as Sin! But He who hath the keys hath sworn that our sin shall not loose the covenant bond, and therefore I wait in hope and in patience till His time shall come to take off all my fetters and make a hole in this cage of death that the imprisoned bird may find its long-promised liberty.'

I would not live alway, thus fettered with sin,
Temptation without and corruption within;

In a moment of strength, if I sever the chain,
Scarce the victory is mine ere I'm captive again;
E'en the rapture of pardon is mingled with fears,
And the cup of thanksgiving with penitent tears;
The festival trump calls for jubilant songs,
But my spirit her own miserere prolongs.
'Who, who would live always away from his God!
Away from yon heaven, that blissful abode
Where the rivers of pleasures flow o'er the bright plains,
And the noon-tide of glory eternally reigns;
Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Saviour and brethren transported to greet
While the songs of salvation exultingly roll,
And the love of the Lord is the bliss of the soul.'