

THE CHILDREN'S PORTION,

“ Friendly the teacher stood, like an angel of light there among them,
And to the children explained he the holy, the highest, in few words ;
Thorough, yet simple and clear, for sublimity always is simple,
Both in sermon and song, a child can seize on its meaning.”

Longfellow.

THE CHILDREN'S PORTION.

BY

ALEXANDER MACLEOD, D.D.,

Author of

"Talking to the Children," "The Gentle Heart," etc.

"The children's bread."

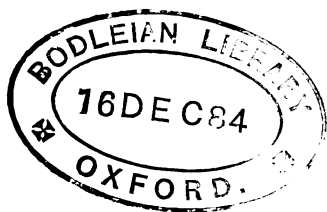
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PREFACE.



FOR some years I have been in the habit of giving from ten to fifteen minutes of the Morning Service on Sunday to the instruction of the children present. In that brief space a children's hymn is sung and a children's sermon preached. The sermon is the "portion" announced in the title of this little book,—the children's portion, or share, of the Sunday feast. And the book itself is a selection from the portions given during the last three years. The filled-out title would be,—THE CHILDREN'S PORTION IN THE SUNDAY SERVICE.

So far as the matter printed goes, the sermons are given very nearly as delivered. But those who have had much experience in speaking to children know, that certain things which are necessary to success in such speaking,—the repetitions, the catchwords for memory, the crumbling down of hard words in a text, and the little escapes of tender endearment,—will not bear reproduction in print. Besides, it is, after all, only the main thoughts and illustrations of such

sermons which, when transferred to a book, can be interesting either to young or old.

The practice of bringing in a little sermon for the children during the ordinary service is, I am happy to know, extending. But as yet it is still the exception. And it will not, I trust, be considered out of place if I use this Preface to say a word or two in its commendation.

At least one in every three who come to our churches is a child under twelve years of age. In every congregation of worshippers, therefore, there is a congregation of children.

Sunday brings to those young hearts a certain stir of expectation. Everything is different from other days. The very preparation announces that it is to some great festival the family are going. The thoughts of the children are set toward a great occasion. Sunday after Sunday they go up to it with expectation in their hearts; and Sunday after Sunday, in the majority of our churches, this expectation is not recognized,—their presence is not felt, and they are not once addressed. The psalms and hymns express experiences at which they have not arrived. The sermon is in a language they do not understand. At length the great occasion has come to an end: the people are faring back to their homes; but not one word has been spoken to the children, concerning whom our Lord left this injunction, "Feed My lambs."

Who can think of the immense number of children

throughout our churches, who come up to the public service Sunday after Sunday with eager hope of finding some interest for their young souls, with that hope growing smaller and smaller as the brief years of childhood run out, until at last the pathetic habit is formed of expecting nothing? Who can think of this, and not sympathize with the desire to provide for them also a portion in the service, which they shall look forward to, and by which their spiritual lives shall be fed?

I use the freedom here of entreating my younger brethren in the ministry to consider these circumstances of the children in their flocks, and whether it is not their duty in some way or other to meet their need. It cannot be a satisfactory reflection to any minister that his teaching flows like a river not through but past the lives of the children. It could not but be joy to him and a blessing to his own soul, if at every morning service, for one ten minutes out of the ninety, he were in direct contact with the souls of the children. It seems to me—I say it respectfully—that never a Sunday should pass in which the preacher does not give wings to some story of God's love, or Christian life. Such a story will go up and down, and in and out, in young hearts, throughout the week that follows, doing work for God. In this way he would whet and keep whole the appetite of the children for the services of the sanctuary. Doing this, he would open to their young eyes the windows of heaven, and give

them glimpses of the vision of God. And in that golden space, in those so consecrated minutes, he would bring back for them, and it may be for their parents as well, the days when Jesus spoke to the disciples in parables, and taught those children of His love, as they were able to receive His words.

49, SHREWSBURY ROAD, BIRKENHEAD.

September 1884.

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A DEAD MAN BROUGHT TO LIFE.

THREE PORTIONS.

I. A WOODEN GOD.

II. A REVIVAL.

III. THE MIRACLE.

A DEAD MAN BROUGHT TO LIFE.

THREE PORTIONS.

I.

A WOODEN GOD.



YOU must not imagine when you hear of miracles that they were only wrought in Galilee and Judea, and only when Jesus was living on the earth. Miracles never cease. Jesus is working them now, and in this very land. When He was bidding the disciples farewell He said, "I go away ; but I will send another Comforter." "Another," he said. That meant, One who should be in His place and carry on His work. In this other Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, Jesus is still living among men, still going about doing good—opening the eyes of the blind, making the lame to walk, and raising the dead. It is to the study of one of these miracles I am going to take you to-day.

I am about to tell you the story of a man who was raised from the dead.

He was really dead ; but the deadness was not in

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a dead man of Joe. It was like letting a murderer into the best places of his soul. Everything brave, and good, and reasonable, and kind in him was killed. His good sense, his home-love, his very cleverness as a player—all fell down stabbed to the heart within him. And it was no longer Joe. It was a savage—a monster, who, coming home from these suppers, struck at wife and children in a blind fury, until they fled beyond the reach of his blows.

There was one thing in Joe which more than anything else had long since been killed. That was religion. Joe neither went to church nor let his wife or children go. He did not believe in going to church. He had six children, and not one of them was baptized. He spent his Sundays lounging about the house or the fields. In the afternoon the neighbours would come in to have a chat, and would sometimes say with a smile, "Well, Joe, have you been to kirk to-day?" Always when this was said his wife answered for him, "Nay, he's no been to kirk," and then, pointing to the draught-board on the chimney-piece, would add, "Joe's god is a wooden god."

Although Joe only smiled when his wife spoke in this way, her words took hold of him. And sometimes, on the Sundays, as he saw his neighbours going past to the village church, he would catch himself saying, "Joe's god is a wooden god." But he only hardened himself the more against church-going. "It's all rant," he would say. "Gi'e me a man that's honest and kind,

his body. His body was full of life ; it was strong, well built, and tall. The deadness was in his soul. Almost everything that God likes to see living in a soul was dead in him—love for God, desire for heaven, concern about salvation, prayer, thankfulness, kindness to wife and children, self-respect, respect for religion and the Church,—all these were dead. If the Apostle Paul had known him, he would have called him “a man dead in trespasses and sins.”

The things that killed out the life in Joe were gambling and drink. In the cleverness that can move chequers on a draught-board so as to win the game, he was the best in all the district where he lived. Many a match he had played for the county ; many a game he had won for it. Although he was only a collier, everybody, rich and poor, called him “the champion.” Joe was proud of that. His draught-playing was the pride of his life ; and his draught-board with its black and white squares, standing on the kitchen mantelpiece between two brass candle-sticks, was the first object he looked at on entering his home.

The evil thing for Joe was that the games in which he took such pride were all played in public-houses. And when a game was over, and especially if Joe had won, his friends who had made money by his winning would order a supper that they might drink to his health. This was the snare in which poor Joe, like a silly bird, was caught. This was the evil that made

a dead man of Joe. It was like letting a murderer into the best places of his soul. Everything brave, and good, and reasonable, and kind in him was killed. His good sense, his home-love, his very cleverness as a player—all fell down stabbed to the heart within him. And it was no longer Joe. It was a savage—a monster, who, coming home from these suppers, struck at wife and children in a blind fury, until they fled beyond the reach of his blows.

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and I seek nae better." Joe was far from being such a man ; but by words like these he deceived himself, and was content to remain among the dead.

I used to be very sorry for his wife. She had known happier days. Her father was an elder in the village church, and she herself had been in the choir before she married Joe. It was for long a hard lot to her to have to stay away from church. She missed the happy Sundays—the sweet singing of the choir and the good words of my friend, who was her minister. It was harder still when she came to have children. She would have liked to have taken them to church to be baptized. Alas ! they were never allowed to enter the church. They did not go even to a Sunday-school. " It's all rant, Jeanie," their father would say to her when she pleaded with him to let them go. Joe was not so bad as that when she married him. Although he did not even then care much about the church, he had not been caught by the snare of drink ; and for many years he was as kind as a man could be. The children used to watch for his home-coming and run out to meet him ; and Joe would come striding along the road with two of them on his shoulders and the rest running at his side.

But those times were long since past. Everything had changed for Jean. Her home was miserable. Her life was full of sorrow. The church seemed far away from her, out of her reach, in another and distant world. And her children were growing up without

learning to worship God. Sometimes, sitting by herself, her eyes would fill with tears as she thought of her life, and she would say, "Is there no hope? Is this to go on from year to year till we die? Is Joe really to perish?"

I cannot say that Jean prayed to God. It is not easy to live in a house like hers, and keep up the habit of praying. But she was afflicted, and she lifted up the cry of the afflicted. And God heard her cry, and was even then on His way to her help.

II.

A REVIVAL.

Two things took place which prepared the way for the work of God on Joe.

The first was a revival. There is nothing in our life more wonderful. It comes when nobody is thinking of it. People are busy in their homes and work-places, as at other times: the peasant in the field; the weaver on his loom; the housewife at her fireside; the merchant in his shop. And suddenly this wonder begins. It begins in the soul. A still small voice is heard speaking to the soul about Christ, about heaven, about eternity. Everybody begins to feel that God is near. It is as if the heaven had opened and some great new thing had come down. It is like the old miracle of the angels in the sky when Christ was born.

There was a sense of something wonderful having

taken place. Some were afraid ; others said, Can this good thing be real ? Then neighbour talked to neighbour about it, and told each other what they felt working in their souls. By-and-by the fear passed and joy came in its place. Homes that had not known prayer or praise for years began to be filled with the sweet music. People who thought it tiresome to speak about religion could now speak of nothing else. Men and women, boys and girls, went into quiet places and cried to God for a blessing. Everything took on a new look. Everything common was lifted into the light of heaven. And people who had all their life long loved the Lord felt that they were loving Him now with a better and stronger love, and their hearts were filled with gladness.

It spread as the dawn does. All the country round about was filled with it. Travellers driving along the highways and parish roads in the evening passed many a little company singing hymns as they marched along. As the reapers rested for their midday meal they broke out into songs of joy. Even the children coming from the school took up the hymns and sang them as they returned to their homes. The strangest thing of all was the way in which it took hold of the miners. The men went down into the pits daily singing the revival songs. The songs were heard from one and another in the darkness of the pits, and when the men came up again the songs burst out anew. Begrimed, black, disfigured by coal-dust and mining-dress, the

men marched in little parties along the road singing as they went.

It seemed as if suddenly old things had become new. The Sunday service was new, the sermon was new, and it was a new gospel the people heard. The very Bible became new. It was a delight to go to church. The Communion Sunday when it came round was like a feast-day of heaven. God was felt to be meeting with the people, and the people became more and more eager for His blessing. A strong desire also took hold of them to share the joys they had received with others. Prayer-meetings were opened in the villages round about. A meeting was begun in the village where Joe lived, and in the cottage that stood nearest to his own. Nobody could tell the happiness which this was to Jean. Although she could not go to the church, the church, through this meeting, had come to her. She tidied up the children and herself, and prepared to go to it.

While these wonderful things of the revival were taking place and changing the life of the village, the second event to which I referred was laying hold of Joe. Two or three months before, a man had come forward and said he would play Joe for the championship. Nobody knew better than Joe himself that he was not as clever at the game as he used to be. Although he never took drink before playing, the drink he took after was fast hurting him and making him dull and stupid. But he could not refuse the challenge. Great preparations were made by the friends of the two

players. The game was to come off in the inn of a little town about ten miles from his village, and he had to be absent from home a couple of days. He came back on the evening of the second day, just as Jean was opening the door to go to the meeting. She saw at a glance that he had lost the game. He had neither sign nor smell of drink, but he was silent and sullen, and in one of his cruel moods. Why were they dressed? he asked angrily. Did they mean to go in with the rangers? They should not go if he could hinder. And if they dared to go when he was gone, he would beat every one of them when he came back.

The poor mother knew too well when Joe spoke in that way that he would keep his word. She could not speak; she could not even shed tears. She simply took off her bonnet and shawl and sent the children out to play. But as the sound of the psalms which were being sung next door was blown in through the open window, she thought that the very saddest hour of her life had come. But it was not so. Although she knew it not, she was at the end of her weary sufferings. She had heard the last cruel word Joe was to speak either to the children or her. That very night Joe was to be met by God.

III.

THE MIRACLE.

In a coal-mine when there is plenty of trade the miners work day and night. At that time Joe was on

the night shift, and so soon as he had changed his clothes and fixed his lamp on his cap, he set out for the pit. There was still some daylight in the sky, and Joe went by back roads where no one could meet him. When he came to the pit's mouth his fellow-miners were waiting for him, and ready to go down. Whether they saw that he was vexed, or were thinking of something better, no one spoke of his failure. And in a minute or two they were all standing in the iron basket, in which they were let down to the bottom of the mine. The mine was very deep, and the coal lay in seams in which a miner could not stand upright when cutting it out. He could only dig out the coal by lying on his side. And usually only one could work in such a seam. Joe crawled to the place in the seam he was working, but somehow or other he could not settle to his work. The cruel words he had spoken about the meeting kept coming into his thoughts. It seemed to him as he lay there in the almost total darkness that they were wicked as well as cruel. And then the shame of losing the championship fell on him, and then scorn of himself that by his own follies he had lost it. And then began, in that total darkness, the great miracle of raising a dead soul to life. God met this poor dead one in the deep pit, and said to him, "Arise from the dead." Now it is God's way, when working a wonder like that which He was about to work on Joe, to use some word from the Bible. But Joe knew almost nothing of the Bible. He had not opened it

since he was a boy at school. Therefore God made use of such words as he did know. He took the words he had so often smiled at when his wife spoke them on Sunday afternoons: "Joe's god is a wooden god," and worked these among the man's thoughts. "A wooden god!" The words seemed to him to come back to him out of some world in which they had been treasured up against him. Without knowing what he had done, he had set his lamp on the floor, a little distance from where he lay. And it seemed to him as if it broke into little stars far, far away, which he was trying to come near to, but was kept back from by the words "A wooden god." It was really as Jean had said. He had given himself, body and soul, to the worship of the draught-board. For that, he had turned away from church and home. He thought of his unkind treatment of his wife and children. He thought of the happy times he had cast away from his life. He thought of the waste of years and strength, of wages and happiness in the public-house. Just at that moment a waft of song came to him from another seam in the pit. Two or three men there were singing a hymn together. This added to his misery. Joe had never joined in such a song. For all the years of his married life he had never spoken to his children about God. He had never taken them to the house of prayer. In all this, God was showing him the form of man he had been. He saw himself as he had been living for years, a miserable creature, dead to everything, dead to

God. As these visions of his past life swept across his soul, he trembled from head to foot. He could not move. He could not cry. The rock above him seemed to be closing down upon him. He still saw the feeble flicker of his lamp, but it only made the darkness more real for him. In a dim way he began to be aware, and the terror of it fell down into his soul, that he was alone with God.

How long this state of things continued Joe never knew. But when the other miners came up in the morning he did not appear. Nobody had seen him since they went down the night before. Two of the men went down to search for him. They called at the entrance to his seam, but he made no reply. At last they found him lying as if he were dead, but with his eyes wide open, at the spot where he had gone to work. Going back for help, they got him to the top and laid him on the ground. He was breathing, but he could not speak, and every now and again a great quiver went through his body. The men got a stretcher and carried him to his home. There Joe lay for three days, speechless, but little by little coming to himself. And then, as feeble as an infant, he got up. His neighbours were very kind. His wife's old minister also came to see him, and began to tell him of the love of God. Joe thanked him, but said it was thrown away on him. God could never take hold of him. There might be love for everybody else in the world, but not for him. "My god has been a wooden god." Then he broke

down, and sobbed like a child. The minister came to see him every day. He was very wise in speaking to men like Joe. He knew how to win them. He did not speak much. He only read little bits of the Gospels and the First Epistle of John. On these occasions Joe sat with his head on his hands ; but always when the minister, after reading, asked if they might pray, he replied, "Surely, surely." And thus, little by little, this once dead soul, the gates of which had been first pressed open by the words, "Joe's god is a wooden god," received the whole gospel, and he began to live to God. It was nearly six months before he ventured to go to the church. It was a summer day, and the road was full of people going to the service. Everybody was glad to see him. Jean was by his side, and the children came up behind dressed in new clothes. For the six months which followed Joe was never absent. Then, one night, the minister was in his study, and heard a knock at the door. It was Joe. "Would it be too much for him to ask to be received into the Church? Could Jean and he be received?" The minister welcomed him with joy of heart. And at the next communion Joe and Jean were there. Three months more passed, and again he knocked at the minister's door. "Could his children be baptized?" "Certainly," replied my friend, and added, "You would like the baptism to be in the house, Joe? Shall I come next Monday?" But Joe said, "Thanks, minister. It is very kind of you to offer to come ; but

if it is all the same to you, as I sinned openly, I should like to acknowledge God openly in this, and I will come to the church." And to the church he came with his children. There were few dry eyes in the church that afternoon as Joe and Jean led their children, one by one, up to be baptized.

The neighbours asked Jean, some months after, how she liked the new ways of Joe. "It's just heaven upon earth," she said. Joe was a new man.

That is the story of the man whom the Holy Spirit raised from the dead.



"POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH."

"POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH."



AMONG the wonderful things mentioned in the New Testament none is more wonderful than this, that it was by poor people the good news concerning Christ was first made known. Never were poorer people than these. Poor fishermen, poor tent-makers, poor labouring men and women, poor slaves,—such were the people by whom the good news was carried throughout the world. They had neither money nor fine clothing, nor lands nor fine houses. They had nothing but what they earned by the labour of their hands. They came from fishing villages, from despised little homes among the hills, from back streets in great cities. Nobody knew them. Nobody ever heard of them before. They were mocked. They were beaten with rods. They were cast into prison. Yet they were helped by God to go from place to place telling their wonderful story. And poor and despised and ill-treated though they were, they made the world rich by the story they told.

"Poor, yet making many rich:" that was how Paul described them. They arrived in the great cities, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, or Philippi, and began in the first company they entered to tell their news. They had seen the Son of God on the earth. They had seen Him opening the eyes of the blind, healing the sick, raising the dead. More wonderful still, they had seen wicked men putting Him to death, and they had seen Him alive again, risen from among the dead. They were like people who had been in heaven. In a sense they had really been in heaven. They had been with the King of heaven. They had heard Him speak. They had received His blessing. They had His life in their hearts. I fancy myself sometimes back in those meetings, where these poor people were telling their story. I see their eyes streaming with tears as they tell of the cruel sufferings the dear Saviour had to endure. And I see the tears dried up and a glow over all their face as they tell of His resurrection and His going up to heaven.

At those meetings people who had never heard of the kindness of God learned from the lips of these messengers that He so loved the world as to send His only Son to die for it. People who did not know the mighty power of God learned that it was so great as to break the door of the grave and bring the dead Saviour back to life. After hearing news so gladsome many burst out into joyful cries. "The great God loves us," they said; "and He will not leave our souls

to perish, nor our bodies to lie in the dust for ever!" Great new thoughts came into their hearts, such as never had been there before. Strange new desires stirred within them and made them eager to be near to God that they might love Him and serve Him better than they had ever done. It seemed to themselves as if they had been carried up to the very door of heaven and had seen its happy life, and the Saviour who had died for them sitting on its throne, and a light of love on His face as He turned His look to where they stood.

In this way, in the days when Paul lived, the poor made many rich. But it is not back in those days only that this wonder has been seen. There never has been a time in which God did not give grace to poor people to do this very thing. It is a wonder that never ceases. We have only to open our eyes, and we shall see it in the days in which we ourselves are living. Nobody is too poor to be used in the service of the loving God. The greatest Servant He ever had upon the earth was so poor that He had not where to lay His head.

Sometimes when I stand up to speak to you, and see your faces glowing with health, and think of the bright homes in which you live, where everything comes to you like magic, where want is unknown, and remember homes of a different kind, where food is scant, where faces are pale, the thought comes into my mind that although in some things you are well off, in others, by your very well-offness, you suffer loss. You do not

know the gladness over little mercies which those who dwell in such homes know. You do not know the tenderness which God shows to the people who live in these homes, nor the help which He brings into their humble lives, nor the great uses to which, through their very poverty, they are sometimes put.

Receiving so many good things from God yourselves, which poor children never receive, you might think—at any rate, you are in danger of thinking—that God is kind only to you and to children as well off as you. Therefore I am going to tell you a story of the kindness of God to the poor. And by this story I shall try to make plain to you the wonder of which I have spoken, how He works this power of making others rich into the lives of the poor.



LIZZIE LAIRD.

IN THREE PORTIONS.

- I. HER POVERTY.
- II. GOD COMES TO HER HELP.
- III. HIS POOR ONE MAKES OTHERS RICH.

LIZZIE LAIRD.

IN THREE PORTIONS.

I.

HER POVERTY.



THIS is a story of our own days, and of one of God's daughters who was very poor, I am going to tell. I think, when I tell you all the story, you will see that almost nobody could be poorer than she. She was a lonesome woman, who lived on alms and was broken in body. And yet, by God's blessing upon her, through many years, she was enabled to make many rich.

It is just seventy years since Lizzie Laird was born. Her birthplace was a colliers' village in Scotland. Her father was a collier. It was a poor cottage he and his children had to live in. It was poor clothes they wore. It was poor food they ate. And they had a bit of poverty in their lot worse than any of these. They were a kind of slaves. They were bought and sold

with the land on which they lived. And all their days both father and children had to drudge on poor wages, in the dismal coal-pits, for the owner of the land. One of the hardest things in this part of their poverty was that the children had to leave school before they had learned to read, and go down into the pits and work.

This hard thing came to Lizzie before she was ten years old. She had hardly got farther than the second reading book. And she had not even begun to write or do sums. A day came that was the poor child's last day at school. And next day, dressed in a coarse flannel frock and hood, she was standing at the pit mouth waiting to be taken down into the dark workings below. It is pitiful to think of it! From the village to the pit mouth the road passes through fields and woods. The fields were filled with primroses and daisies and buttercups. The birds were busy bringing food to their young in the trees and hedges as she passed. The air was filled with their joyous twitter and song. In an orchard she passed, the apple-blossom was on every tree. The farm children were passing, with their bags and slates, to the school, which she was never more to enter. And high overhead shone the sun. Lizzie was a beautiful child. She had beautiful hair and a beautiful face. I think I see her walking to the pit that summer morning. Her hair is folded back under her hood. Her little face looks out from under it as from a picture frame. Some tears are stealing down her cheeks. The honest father is silently patting her on the shoulder.

A very little would bring tears to his cheeks too. His heart is sore for this child of his love. He feels the hardness of the lot that binds him to take her down into the dismal pit. "Dinna fear, Lizzie." That is all he can say to comfort her. He says it again and again as they come nearer to the pit. He remembers how he also, when he was as young as she, had to go the same road. And he pats her again, and draws her a little closer to him in his love. At last they have come to the place. Grimy men are waiting for them, to go into the iron cage which is to lower them into the workings below. Lizzie is lifted in by her father, who stands close to her; and the cage begins to descend. Down, down, down it goes. Darker and darker grows the way. Poor Lizzie would cry if the strange men were not there. At last she feels herself lifted out, and her life as a child-slave begins.

For eight long years, every day she lived, except Sundays, she had to go down into that pit. For eight long years she was set to cruel work fit only for a beast of burden. Day by day, all through those years, she had to fill barrows with the coals dug out by the miners and then wheel the coals to the foot of the shaft, to be taken up by the trucks to the top. Could any young life be poorer? She had neither school nor books, nor times for play. Her beautiful face, which would have been a joy to look at, was hidden in the darkness of the pit. She had to toil in that darkness when the sowers were sowing in the fields in spring,

and the reapers in autumn were cutting down the grain. She had to toil where no bird sang, where no flower grew, where no sun shone. That was the lot of Lizzie Laird till she was eighteen years of age. Poor, poor Lizzie ! And yet she was to become poorer still. She was to become so poor that this time between childhood and womanhood, this hard time when she had to step into the iron cage every morning, and wheel her heavy load from the workings to the shaft, along the dark tunnels, should seem to her a time of riches. Poor though she was during all that time, she still had certain things which were better to her than gold or silver. She had health. She had strength to toil. She could walk. She could run. And every afternoon she had the joy of coming home. And she had her beauty still. And she was young, and full of life, of happy spirits, and of hope. She was even counting the months till she should not need to go down into the pit at all. Love had come to her, and she was engaged to be married. These were good things in her lot—real riches, but she was about to lose them all.

One day, driving her wheelbarrow along one of the tunnels—without a moment's warning, and while she was right under it—the roof fell down upon her, and the beautiful girl was buried under masses of rock. The miners, hearing the noise, rushed to the spot. But it was hours before the poor sufferer was reached and got out. Her beautiful form was broken. She was maimed, bruised, spoiled for life. Her limbs were

crushed out of shape, crushed together into one indescribable mass. She was all but dead.

For four years she had to lie on her face, wounded all over, with flesh all bruised, and in agonies of pain. But worse to bear, I think, than her pain was her sorrow, her lament for her youth. Day and night she cried over her blighted hopes and the young joys, and the life and health that could never return. Poor Lizzie ! It was a sorrow, among heavier sorrows, that the young man to whom she was engaged might cease to love her. One day he failed to call on her at the usual hour. It was the fair at Falkirk. And she said, "He has gone to the fair and forgotten me." But just then the honest lad pushed open the door and came in. He had indeed been to the fair ; but it was to get her a basket of blackberries, which she liked, and which he brought and laid beside her on her bed.

At the end of four years the pain ceased ; but her strength never returned to her. Her limbs fell from her bit by bit. She gave her sweetheart his liberty. She was an invalid all the rest of her days ; for forty-nine years she never was able to leave her bed. She saw her father and mother passing away by death. Her brothers and sisters also went out from the home, some dying, some into homes of their own. There was left with Lizzie only one sister, and she was both deaf and dumb. And they were both penniless. This was the poverty of Lizzie Laird.

II.

GOD COMES TO HER HELP.

I have told you of the poverty of Lizzie Laird. In the things that made this poverty she remained poor to the end of her life. But I am going to tell you now how God came to her in her poverty, and made her rich in other things—in the things of the soul—with which things in her after-years she was able to make others rich.

Very wonderful are the ways which God has in helping the poor among His children. When things are very bad with them, when they seem to be at the worst, He steps in with His help. It is the old story of the Israelites over again. They are fleeing before the face of cruel foes ; their way is stopped up by some bitter sea. And just then, when they seem to be lost, the Lord opens up a way for them, divides the very sea for them, and brings them by that new way into a better life than they had ever known. And so He did with Lizzie Laird.

The first thing He did was to open up a way for her to His own heart. It was the great highway by which so many have travelled to that heart. It was the highway of the Cross. He began by turning her thoughts to a lot more sorrowful than her own. He brought her to the Cross of His Son. Lizzie had never before seen the terribleness of the sufferings of Christ. It went to her heart that the innocent Jesus should have been so cruelly used. She thought of the

crown of thorns, of the nails, of the shame, of the mocking, of the pain, till the tears ran like streams from her eyes. What were her sufferings compared with His? Then God opened her eyes to see that the Sufferer was a Sufferer for her. For love of her He had endured those thorns, those nails, those pains, and the hiding of His Father's face. But the most wonderful vision of all was when she came to see that the Sufferer and God were one, that the Cross was a door opening into the heart of God, and that the heart it opened up was a heart filled with love for her. Little by little she came to understand that Jesus had died to make a way for her from all her sorrow, and from all sin, to peace and joy and a dwelling-place in the heart of God. When Lizzie first caught sight of this she cried as much for joy as before she had cried for sorrow. When she went to sleep at night the joy was there; when she awoke in the morning it was still there; it was like a bird of heaven for ever singing in her soul.

When God had thus opened up to Lizzie the way to His heart, He next put the desire into hers to be a good reader of His Word. Lizzie had been taken from school before she could read well. She now set herself to learn to read, that she might be able to learn all the story of the Cross.

And before long, so eager was she that she became an excellent reader, and soon thereafter she had favourite places which she read over and over again. There was one verse which she took into the deepest

and warmest part of her heart. It was the verse which says, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." I cannot tell you the joy those words were to her, or the effect they had on her thoughts. They seemed to change everything. They made her troubles look small and her mercies great. And when people would still sometimes pity her, she would smile and say: "Ay, but I have something grand over against all my sufferings: I know that 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.'"

Another kindness which God sent to Lizzie was the friendship of some Christian gentlewomen in the neighbourhood. Those ladies, real angels of God upon earth, saw this poor child of their heavenly Father, saw her misery, her poverty, and her loneliness, and their hearts were drawn out in sisterly pity towards her. Out of this friendship came help of many kinds: help in food, in clothing, in books, in widening of thought, in refinement of speech, and what was better still, in brightening of her religious life. They were themselves religious people. And it happens that the Church to which they belonged has a comfort for sick people which the Church in which Lizzie was brought up does not possess. It can bring the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper into a sick-room. And the heart of this lonely Christian, so many years shut out from the Church itself, longed to show its love to her Saviour in this way. When the friends I am referring to knew this, they asked their clergyman to bring the Sacrament

to Lizzie. And he and they and she took it together in Lizzie's room. It was a great new joy to Lizzie.

It was also the beginning of her acquaintance with the prayer-book used in the church of these friends. She read in this every day from that time on and used the prayers morning and evening. Then she got to understand the feast days and the prayers and passages of Scripture proper to those days. It was new to her to link particular days with particular events in the life of Christ. But little by little those days came to her like new thoughts, like new joys into the days of the year. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Whit Sunday, and all the rest: she came to be interested in them and to seek to be in the spirit of them when they came. Her year became a Christian year. And as often as one of the great days came round a fresh white counterpane was spread on her bed, new flowers were gathered to brighten the room, a little service was held, often by herself alone. It was, while it lasted, a little gleam of heaven upon earth.

In all this God was making Lizzie fit to be an enricher of others. So long as she kept moaning over her hard lot and her lost chances, and thinking of nobody but herself, she could be a help to nobody. But God, as we have seen, brought her away from all that moaning. He drew her heart to Himself. He helped her to give up being sorry about her hurts. He helped her to see that He could turn what had happened to her to good. And he gave her grace to

ay, and from the heart to say : " Not my way, but Thine, O God."

I must not leave you to think it was quite easy for Lizzie to say this. It was far from easy, and it was a long time before she was able to say it. And I will tell you a little bit of her life, which belongs to some years after the years I am speaking of just now, which will show you how hard and slow the work was of bringing her in all things to commit her way to God and say, " Thy will be done."

Lizzie had a great love for light. I suppose this arose from the cruel way in which she had been shut out from the light when she was made to work in the coal-pit. Perhaps, also, the love of light had been born with her. To her, as to others, light was pleasant to the eyes. At any rate, it was part of life to love it. She loved to think of the sun. She loved to think of the morning light creeping up from behind the hills, shining over them, growing brighter and stronger, and filling the valleys with beauty and colour, and spreading over all the earth. And nothing of an outward kind was a greater joy to her than to look on green fields and woods and gardens when the sun was shining on them. But in the poor cottage in which she lived she was shut out from this joy. Her bedroom window looked out on nothing beautiful at all. She could neither see green fields, nor woods, nor garden, nor sunrise, nor sunset. She could not even see the sky, but only a dull unchanging square of light, the mere size of the window frame.

As she lay in her little room her heart kept longing for some chance of seeing those beautiful sights, the trees, the green fields, and the rising and setting lights of the sun. She remembered the days of her childhood, when, coming up out of the darkness of the pit in the evening, she saw the bars of gold and purple in the sky. She remembered also the rainbows she had seen, and the moon and the stars, and the driving clouds, and the shadows creeping along the hill-sides. And she longed to see those beautiful things again.

Well, this very desire of her heart was to be given to her; but in a strange way, and only for a moment. A season of heavy rains had come. The roads in the villages were like rivers. The fields on every side became like lakes. The water rose higher and higher and began to flow into the cottages. The villagers had to escape for their lives. At last it rose to the cottage where Lizzie and her dumb sister lived. The neighbours came to their help, and lifting Lizzie in her bed as she was, they carried her out of her little room—out of the dull light of that room into the open—into a place of safety under the full light of day. And it was too much for her. By the very light she longed for, she was smitten blind. She remained blind for some time. After that—when her sight returned to her—she gave up sorrowing for green fields and fuller light. In respect of these things, much as she loved them, she learned to say, “Thy way, not mine, O Father.” She put herself wholly into the hands of

God, to give her light or darkness, green fields or absence of green fields, as He saw to be best. And her heavenly Father, who was not grudging the joy of green fields and sunlight to His afflicted child, but only weaning her from beautiful things which she had no longer eyes to look upon—began to open up for her every day things more beautiful far in that world whose light never fades and whose beautiful things even the blind can see.

And Lizzie came to understand that this was the purpose of God. And freely and heartily she gave herself up to be dealt with as God thought best. And from that hour life grew brighter for her: the tears went out of her eyes and the sorrow out of her heart, and she began to be an enricher of others.

III.

HIS POOR ONE MAKES OTHERS RICH.

Lizzie was now prepared for the good work which she was to carry on for God in that poor room for more than forty years. It was, as I have told you before, the work of making others rich. It was very quiet work. It was work that, in the doing, made little show. I am sure Lizzie herself never thought of it as work. But, all the same, it was work, and work of a kind that is very precious to God.

I will begin by telling you how she made rich the poor deaf and dumb sister who lived with her. Poor

and broken though Lizzie was, she was less poor than this sister. She felt that she was set over her to care for her, and she became mother and father to her. At that time schools for the deaf and dumb were not open for people as poor as Lizzie's sister, and there was nobody to teach the finger signs which are now known to so many. But Lizzie made signs for her sister and herself by which they could understand each other. Sometimes it was a look, sometimes a movement of the hand ; but, one way and another, the deaf sister understood, and life was made pleasant to her, and home was made a happy place to her. I think that is a beautiful fact in Lizzie's life, that she began her work of enriching others by making happy the poor dumb sister under her own roof.

In the village where Lizzie lived girls were married when very young, and they were mothers before they had learned many of the things which mothers need to know. These young mothers used to come to Lizzie for advice. She was an excellent needlewoman, and knew how to shape and sew dresses and under-clothing for the babies. She taught them to sew, to shape, and to make up the little dresses. She taught them also to patch and to darn. And she did all this in the cheeriest way, encouraging them, and dropping in good words for God as the sewing lesson went on, and words to help them to strive to make their homes happy and bright. Many a young mother got rich blessings at Lizzie's bedside. When the lessons in

sewing were ended, they found that they had been receiving lessons better still all the while. They had learned that heaven was very near to them, that the brightness of it and the love of it could be in the poorest cottage. They had found it in the room of this poor sick woman, and they left her presence with this thought in their hearts, that it could be brought into the homes over which they themselves were set, and into the lives of the little children they had received from God.

There was one thing of which Lizzie was very fond. She liked to have little meetings for prayer in her room, and by-and-by these meetings came to be held from month to month to pray for a blessing on the work of foreign missions. For these meetings Lizzie always prepared herself. She had become, through her intercourse with the kind ladies I mentioned, a most beautiful reader. She selected interesting stories from the missionary magazines, and read them between the prayers. In this way she kept alive an interest in missionary work among those who came to the meetings. Those who came got tidings of work for God which, perhaps, they would not otherwise have got. But they got far more than that. They also saw the interest taken in God's work by that poor invalid. They saw her face glowing with joy as she read of that work in heathen lands. They heard the sweet murmur of Christian speech of one who was herself living to God. And they returned to their homes with

this feeling in their hearts, that they had been attending a missionary meeting at the very gate of heaven.

Lizzie's greatest work for God, in the enrichment of others, was work of example. This is work which is very dear to God. It is greater than almost any other work we can do. To everybody who entered her room Lizzie was an example of patient suffering. She was, as I have told you, very poor. Money she had none, except what she received from kind friends and the parish. She was broken in body—a mere trunk—fixed on her bed, obliged to lie on her face; yet no murmur ever passed her lips. She took a loving interest in the affairs of her neighbours. If any good came to them, she rejoiced; if any sorrow, she wept with them. She loved children, and was loved by them in return. Bands of them would come at times and sing hymns at her door to cheer her. As a rule she was cheerful, sometimes even merry, when friends called on her. To see Lizzie happy, to hear her pleasant speech, to listen to her merry laugh, was all the same with seeing the kindness and power of God at work. Only God could give the happiness which one so poor and broken as Lizzie now enjoyed. It made people think of God. It made many who grumbled over their own little troubles ashamed of their grumbling; and it opened up to some, who otherwise might never have seen it, a view of the presence of Christ in the house of one of His poorest sisters.

A friend of mine went to see Lizzie sometimes. I will tell you how she made him rich. Her face made him think of angels; it was the likeliest to what he fancied the faces of angels must be. It always seemed to him also, when he was visiting her, as if that humble little room was a room in heaven. Everything he heard and saw spoke to him of the better world. Everything was beautiful. Flowers, although of the commonest sort, always stood on the table. A beautiful white quilt covered the bed. Lizzie's hands were like the hands of a queen. Her pleasant and refined talk was talk with God in it. Her smile was the smile of one who had a continual joy in her heart, and the happy, happy laugh that sometimes came in, was like what he fancied the laughter of children in heaven must be. That was the riches he got. He came away from her presence with the thought in his heart, "I have been in one of the ante-rooms of heaven."

This was the riches with which, through God's help, she enriched the people who came to see her. She opened up views of heaven to them. The light of it shone in her eyes; the speech of it dropped from her lips; and in the hearts of rich and poor alike the thought of it was found after they left the bedroom of poor Lizzie Laird.

Lizzie could not have made people feel in that way if she had not got the life of heaven in her own soul. But it was that life she lived. The thought of heaven, the hope of one day going to Christ there, the feeling

that Christ was meanwhile with her here,—this was the secret of her power to make others rich. It was a joy rising continually in new bursts of gladness in her heart. It was her song in the night. Always night and day welled up and sounded this song in her soul.

And all this grew as she grew old. The light on her face became more and more a light from heaven. Her face itself became more beautiful. Her bright, dark eyes became brighter and more filled with joy. Her fine hair remained with her to the end, and only tinged with grey. Her well-made body showed more and more the beauty that had been spoiled in the dismal mine. Her fine hands grew finer, softer, more and more like the hands of a queen. Her speech became more refined. And the accent of heaven went deeper and deeper into her voice.

About two years before her death her pains came back to her. She had a time of great suffering till the 12th of January, 1881. On that day she died, an old woman not far from seventy years of age, leaning on the neck of a niece she loved. She was buried in the churchyard of the village in which she suffered so long. A great multitude followed her body to the grave. It was felt by many that day that a light of heaven had gone out upon the earth, and that the world was poorer since Lizzie Laird had gone home to God.

THE LITTLE MISSIONARY.

THE LITTLE MISSIONARY.



IN the outskirts of a city I well know, lived, more than thirty years ago, a friend of mine whose name was Barbara. At the time I first met with her she was still a girl attending school. And I remember that she was small and slender in her form, and that she had dark hair and large kindling brown eyes. Everybody who knew her loved her. She was a kindly, eager, bright girl, a great reader, very fond of good books, but especially fond of books about missionaries. And among books of this kind, there was one, much read in those days, which was her greatest favourite. This was the life of a brave young scholar called Henry Martyn, who gave up his English life and went to India to be a missionary there. Barbara used to say. "If I were a boy, and clever like Henry Martyn, I should do just as he did, and go to India too."

A few years after that Barbara was married, and in a home of her own. It was a very pleasant home to

visit. Barbara was happy in her husband, and she and her husband happy in God. And by-and-by they were happier still, for God sent them a beautiful baby boy.

Barbara's heart overflowed with joy and with thankfulness to God. Every now and again, as she clasped her baby to her breast, she would burst forth into singing. A thought greater than she had yet courage to speak of was in her heart. Although she herself could not follow in the footsteps of Henry Martyn, her boy might live to do it. She went into God's presence every day and told this thought to him in her prayers. Then she found courage to name it to her husband. And before many days were over her joy was complete, for her husband and she agreed together to give their boy to God, and to train him up to become a missionary like Henry Martyn.

In this purpose Barbara, with her husband, rested, and had great joy of heart. When the baby was brought to the church to be baptized, the name given was Henry Martyn. And by-and-by it came to be known among their friends in the church that Henry was to become a missionary. When we kissed the baby or took him into our arms to dandle him we called him "the little missionary." And the happy months of babyhood went on.

But when the months of babyhood were past, the friends who came to call on Barbara noticed a strange look about her face. The joy seemed to be going out

of it, and they saw that she looked eagerly at the eyes of her visitors as they looked at her child. But she said nothing. The time had come when the little missionary should have been speaking his first word for God, when he should have been saying "mamma," and he had not said it, nor made any trial of saying it. He never said it. He was both deaf and dumb. He looked up into her face in the old way, the large brown eyes kindling with love ; but that was all. She took him to the doctors in her own city ; she went to Edinburgh and London to show him to more famous doctors there. They could do nothing. Henry Martyn, who had been given to God to be a missionary, remained deaf and dumb.

Barbara had other children, bright like herself, and happy and eager as she had been in her early days. And she bowed her spirit to the will of God with respect to Henry. Often, as the little group were sitting around the table, she would fix her eyes on Henry and wonder over the ways of God. But she never lost faith in God. She never fell into the evil thought that God was unkind to her. She held to this—that God, in His own good way, would bless him and keep him in His love.

It happened that Barbara's youngest brother was living in her home. Soon after Barbara was married her mother died, and the home of her childhood was broken up. On her death-bed her mother had said to her, "Barbara, watch over Reuben ; the rest can take

care of themselves." And Barbara had said, "Darling, I will be unto him even as a mother." And she was. She loved him with a love like the love she put forth on her children. But Reuben was a great care to her. He took no interest in the things of his soul. He never opened his Bible. He never entered a church. He was living like one who did not believe in God, or in Christ, or in a better world. And by-and-by he became friendly with a set of men, both young and old, who met together to study books that made a mock of the Bible and of the Church. Barbara pled with him ; Barbara prayed for him ; in secret Barbara wept over him. And I really believe that this was as hard a trial to her as the dumbness of her firstborn.

From the first day Reuben came into the home the speechless Henry took to him as his friend. When Reuben came in to his meals, the little man ran forward to him with uplifted arms. When Reuben sat down he climbed up on his knee. If he got a new toy or picture-book, Reuben was the first to see it. And of all in the house, when anything ailed him, only Reuben could hush him to sleep. Reuben loved the child as much as the child loved him.

When Reuben's ways had become so as I have described, little Henry was about twelve years old. He had never been strong. He had never been so strong that his parents could send him to a school for the deaf and the dumb. The only teaching he had was from his mother and Reuben. They had learned to speak

with the fingers, and little by little Henry was brought to understand and to use his own. But in the midst of these lessons his health gave way. He had a serious illness. In this illness the little heart yearned more than ever it had done for Reuben. In the evenings, when Reuben came home from his work, the little arms were stretched out for his friend, and he had to be taken out of bed and nestled on Reuben's knees.

And Reuben gave up all his outdoor friends that he might meet this love of the child. He told some of them that he felt Henry tugging at him, and saw him reaching out his arms to him all day long. He came straight home every night, and took up his place as Henry's nurse. And dumb though Henry was, he spoke for God to Reuben's heart. His love made a language of its own that it might appeal to that heart. And in strange ways, which I cannot explain, echoes of the love which God had for both the child and himself began to sound in his heart and escape by his lips in little snatches of remembered hymns. And, more wonderful still, he was led back by the child's need to prayer. Henry's sufferings were sometimes so great and difficult to help that when the rest of the household had gone to their beds, and Reuben was alone with the sufferer, he would kneel beside the little crib and cry to God for help.

In the room where Reuben and the child slept there was a shelf filled with books. And among the books was one with pictures of the sufferings of Christ, by a

great painter called Albert Dürer. In the long evenings, when the child was propped up with pillows and Reuben had shown him every toy and curious thing in the room, he would next take down the picture-book and show him the pictures of the sufferings of Christ. There were pictures of all His sufferings. There was a picture of Christ weeping over Jerusalem, and one of His betrayal in the garden, and one of His scourging, and one of His fainting under the weight of the Cross, and one of Him when hanging on the Cross. But the picture which most moved little Henry was that in which the Lord is being nailed to the Cross. The Cross is lying on the ground; the Lord is stretched upon it. A man is driving a nail into the left hand; another man is boring a hole to make the place ready for the right hand; in front a soldier is waiting with the nail; behind, the mother of Christ is looking on with a face full of anguish, and behind her are the women of Jerusalem that wept for Jesus. It is one of the most awful pictures of the Lord's sufferings ever made by man. Henry asked to see it every evening. And by the finger-speech—as well as he could—the child was made to understand both Who the sufferer was and why He was suffering. Tears would often come into Henry's eyes as he looked at this picture. And sometimes he would lift it to his lips and kiss it.

But now it was too plain that Henry's own sufferings were to end in death. His face was white and pinched; his brown eyes grew larger and larger and shone like

lamps ; his body was hot and spent. It was an autumn evening when the sufferings came to an end. He had been very restless during the day, but became quiet when Reuben came home and sat by his side with the little hand in his. There was a long glow of red and purple in the sky that evening, and the child was placed so that he could see it. About eight o'clock he motioned to Reuben for the picture-book, and then for the picture which had touched him most. Then he took the book into his thin hands and pressed it open at that picture on his breast. And then, looking straight into his mother's eyes, he died.

So the gracious God did not put Barbara to shame, neither did He reject her gift. Little Henry lived to speak for Him and to save the soul of his uncle. Though dead he continued to speak in the home. Every other child in the family was drawn nearer to God by his death. The home itself in their esteem seemed to be lifted nearer to heaven. And heaven also was more precious to them than ever as they remembered that it was the land where the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

For many years Reuben was not able to speak about Henry without tears. But when those years had passed, he told me that at times he still felt the little sufferer tugging at his heart ; and in the autumn evenings when a glow is on the sky he seems to hear a far-off voice calling to him, "Reuben, my own Reuben, come to me, to this happy land."

OF THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF OURSELVES.

*OF THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF OUR-
SELVES.*



“FOR I say unto you, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you : Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” It was the Apostle Paul who said this. He says it in his letter to the Roman Church. You cannot help feeling, in reading it, that he is very earnest in saying it. He had seen, as he went up and down among the Churches, that it was a thing which much needed to be said. Those were the first Churches, and the people who belonged to them had not been Christians long. There were many things they could not yet understand. And perhaps they did not yet understand that it could be a fault to do what all their lives before they had been doing, to think more highly of themselves than they ought. But, as I have said, Paul is very earnest in telling them that this thing ought not to be. And in another of his letters—his letter to the Philippian Church, he says what may be called the other half of what he said to

those in Rome : "Let each esteem other better than himself." Paul saw that homes would be happier, and churches holier, and the whole world better, if only those two things could be done.

Now, as often as I read those words together, three thoughts come into my heart. First, I cannot help thinking how wonderful it is that things so simple as not thinking too highly of ourselves, and thinking more highly of others than of ourselves, should have such power as they have. Next, I think that they are things which everybody who is willing to try is able, by God's help, to do. And then I am filled with the thought of the exceeding goodness of God in putting such simple, such easy means of doing good into everybody's power.

I really believe, therefore, if the holy Paul were living now and had to speak to children, it would be such words as these he would speak :—"You need, just like the first Christians, to learn how simple and easy the rules of Christian life are ; and how close to you, young though you be, lie powers of God by which you can be working for God and making those about you happy every day you live." Therefore I take those words of Paul for my sermon for you to-day. I say unto you, dear children, through the grace given unto me, to every one who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. And I entreat you, with my whole heart, this very day to begin and let each esteem other better than himself.

It is misery to do anything else. The life that acts otherwise is the evil life of pride. It is pride that leads children to think no other children are as good as they. It is pride that makes it difficult to see the good that is in those around us. More than anything else in an evil heart is this evil of pride a sorrow to God. It blinds our eyes to the good that is in God Himself. It makes us haughty, and envious, and scornful. It leads to heartbreaks in families, and to quarrels in schools, and to hatred and wars with nations. It is such an evil that it can turn religion itself into a thing abominable to both God and man. It was pride that made the Pharisee who was praying beside the Publican in the temple to say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, or even as this Publican."

It was my good fortune not long ago to hear told by a friend some wonderful German stories.* And one of these brings out, so much better than I could do, the misery to which pride of this kind leads, that I shall try to re-tell it instead of preaching a sermon to you to-day.

In a certain German city, many, many years ago, lived a young man who was an organ-builder. Nobody could build such organs as his. And every new one he built was better than the one before. He was called the master-builder.

At last he built one that was better than all the rest. He called it the Wonderful Organ. It was so made

* By Professor Volkmann, of Halle.

that on certain occasions it could play of itself. The occasions when it could play of itself were when good, right-hearted, well-behaved young people came into the church to be married. As soon as two such young persons crossed the threshold of the church the organ began to play of its own accord. But if either the one or the other was bad, or had an evil pride in the heart, it did not play.

When the young master-builder finished this organ, and got it built into its place in the church, he said to himself, "My fortune is made now, and I shall have a home of my own, and a wife. And I will take my bride to the church in which my wonderful organ is. And as soon as we cross the threshold it will burst out into happy music, and all the people will say, 'That is the wonderful organ, and this is the master who built it, and she who is beside him is his bride.'"

So he went one day to seek a bride. He went to the fairest, kindest, most modest girl in all the city, and he said to her that he loved her and wished her to become his bride. And she gave him her love, and the day for the wedding was fixed.

It was a beautiful day, and the wedding guests were happy. But the bridegroom kept filling his heart with the thought, that so soon as he took his beautiful bride into the church his organ would begin to play, and all the people would say, "Listen to the wonderful organ, and see! the builder of it is there." His heart was filled with pride in his organ and himself, so that

there was not room in it for any thought or feeling besides.

So the wedding company came to the church door, and the bridegroom and the bride passed in. But the organ did not play, and its silence went to the bridegroom's heart like a knife. "Have I made a mistake in my choice?" he said to himself. "Is this fair-looking maiden not fair, not good? Alas for me this day!"

He did not once think that the evil which made his organ silent might be the evil of pride in himself. The smiles went out of his face; the joy went out of his heart; his warm hands got cold and clammy. He went through the wedding ceremony like a dead man. He did not touch the wedding breakfast; he did not say one kind word that whole day to his bride; he only kept brooding over the evil thought, that the fair young creature who had given him her love was not fair, nor good, at heart. And with this evil thought in his soul he stole out so soon as the guests were gone and it was dark enough, and left his beautiful bride alone.

He went from street to street till he got outside of the walls. Then he took the road to a foreign country and walked all that night, and the night following, sleeping where he could by day. At last he came to a city in which he was not known, and there he took up his abode. And in that strange city he lived for many years; he lived till grey hairs were beginning to show themselves on his head. And still he thought

that he was in sorrow and in hiding because there had been evil in his bride.

One day, however, when all those years had passed, there came into his heart a great longing to see his native city, and if it might be his bride also once more. He tried to put away the longing; but it would not be put away. So at length he said to himself, "I will go back once more and look upon the organ and upon her." And with that he rose, and left the place in which he had been living so many years. And he turned his steps to the city in which he had left his wonderful organ and his bride.

At last he saw the spires of his native city in the distance, and by-and-by he was at its gate. So eager to enter it was he now that he had begun to run. And the people he passed turned round and looked at the stranger who was running as if for his life.

As he ran he met a funeral procession. The people walking in it were weeping, and the street along which it was passing was filled with people also weeping. "Whose funeral is this?" he asked. "It is the funeral of a saint, of one who has been as an angel in the city, so kind was she to the sick and the poor." Then the people named her. It was his own bride. And, oh! then, in the poor man's soul, fell down the cruel wall which his pride had built, and which, for so many years, had kept him from seeing the spotless purity, the holy charity of his bride. Then, when too late to ask her pardon, he beheld the worth he had

wronged. And in that same moment he learned that it was the pride of his own heart which had stilled the organ on the wedding-day. He trembled from head to foot. A horror of shame and humiliation fell upon his soul, tears streamed from his eyes, and sobs burst from his breast. But he went forth among the pall-bearers and begged to be allowed to help. The people thought he was some poor workman whom their dead angel had helped. But now a wonderful thing took place. As the pall-bearers with the body crossed the threshold and passed forward into the church, the great organ, of its own accord, burst forth into an anthem of praise. It was too much for the poor organ-builder. Sick at heart because of his sin, and faint with his long journey, he sank exhausted at the base of a pillar. He had spoiled his life and the life of the dead one of whom he had not been worthy. Never now could he tell his sorrow. Never now could he give or receive her love. There was just one comfort. He knew that God had forgiveness for sinners as bad as he. And he seemed to hear in the tones of the organ the very tones of the forgiving God.

As the people were about to lower his bride's coffin into the grave, he was seen to grow white and to fall forward on the floor. Some who hurried to his help found that he was already dead. And by some token about his dress or person they discovered that this was the husband of the saint they had come to lay in the grave. And the teaching of God fell upon their hearts.

They kept back the body of the bride. They prepared the dead husband for burial. And they laid them together in the same grave. And as the two bodies were being lowered into the grave, the organ, of its own accord, began to play. It played such an anthem as had never before been heard, of the most heavenly music. But after that it was never known to play of its own accord.



THE WISHING WELL.

THE WISHING WELL.



WAS this autumn taken by a young friend to a well among the Northumberland hills, which is known by the name of "The Wishing Well." It lies in a lonely valley, marshy and stony, where only sheep and cows are to be met. To this well the Northumbrians of former days used to come, and, standing by its brink, silently wish the wish of their heart. And as they did so they said to themselves, "Our wish shall, one day, sooner or later, come to pass."

But that was long ago. That was away back in times when people believed that wells were holy places, in which God sometimes dwelt, and in which His power was present to heal diseases, and even to take sorrow from the heart. In those days it came to be thought that this particular well among the Northumberland hills was a living thing, which had an ear that opened into the ear of God, and that every wish wished at its brink, so be it were the real wish of the heart, would one day surely be fulfilled. It seems mere folly to us now. And although young people still go up to the well, and take their friends to visit it, and make a show

of wishing the wish of their heart at its brink, it is only as a bit of pleasure. The old faith in it is gone. And the going to it and the wishing at its brink are mere forms of a life that is dead.

But as I stood beside it with my young friend that forenoon, in that lonesome valley, with not a sound to break the stillness of the place except our talk, it came into my mind that in one thing at least it was not altogether a foolish belief which the old people had. The wishes of people's hearts are still granted to them. Whether they wish their wishes at holy wells or no, the wish, in the long run, comes to pass. For what comes out in the wish of the heart is the life of the soul. And what the soul wishes for is a prayer that goes at once into the ear of God. And that is true for both you and me. And that makes it needful to see that we have only good wishes in our hearts. For it is with us as with the old Northumbrians. What we truly wish, what we wish deep down in the heart, where only God and our own thoughts can enter,—that, sooner or later, that, in this world or the next, we shall certainly receive.

One of the wonderful stories I heard from the friend I mentioned in my last sermon makes this truth as plain as day. But it is only a little echo of it I can recall. At any rate, I cannot tell it just as it came from him.

Away out in the Northern Sea of Scotland stand clusters of lonely islands. In these, long ago, churches

were few and far between, and many of the islanders had to go to church in boats.

On one particular Sunday a little crowd was waiting for the boat. And among those who went into it when it came were the Laird of Nigg, and a poor hind who attended to sheep and ponies in the winter-time, and in the summer went out to fish.

Now the captain of the boat saw that the wind was rising, and he arranged the people in the seats so as to balance the boat and make it sail fair, and unfortunately he put the Laird and the hind side by side on the same seat. The Laird was very angry, but he could not show his anger, for the hind and he were members of the same church, and although the hind was poor and poorly dressed, he was greatly esteemed.

By-and-by the people began to talk about heaven, and about the happiness they expected there.

"For my part," said the poor hind, "if I should be thought worthy to enter heaven at all, I shall be thankful to sit on the lowest footstool, if only I may see my Saviour from there. I want nothing but to look on the face of Christ for ever."

"I should want a great deal more than that," said the Laird. "I should want a fine house to live in, and plenty to eat, and fine clothes, and as much gold as I could count."

He was going on to tell what other things he wished for, when a strong wind suddenly smote the sails and put an end to the conversation. And before the

captain could hinder it, the boat was driven out to sea, and they did not get to church that day.

The Laird got very drowsy, and by-and-by he fell into a deep sleep. And in his sleep he had this dream. He dreamed that he and the poor hind had died and were on their way together to the gate of the other world. And he began to question the hind about their conversation in the boat. "Do you really mean," he said, "to ask for nothing when you come to heaven, but to sit on a footstool and look on the face of Christ?" "If I only may be admitted to such bliss, I shall be for ever thankful," said the hind.

Then they came to the gate. The poor hind was too timid to knock. He only gave a tiny little tap, as if he were not worthy even to do that. But the Laird seized the great knocker, and made it bang again and again. And immediately the gate was opened, and an angel came out. He looked kindly at the hind, but not so kindly at the Laird. But he said to both, "Come in." Then he brought them into a large round hall, with more than a thousand doors opening into different passages all round. And after looking at them silently for a little, he said, "In this world people receive what they have wished for in the world below. Recall the wish that was the wish of your very heart below. And what you ask for you shall have."

The Laird did not wait to hear what his poor neighbour might ask. He answered at once and said, "I want a marble palace to live in, green velvet edged

with gold to wear, a fine banquet every day, and as much gold as I can count."

"You shall have all these," said the angel. So he opened one of the thousand doors and led him in. Before him was a magnificent palace of marble, whose doors opened to receive him. In the dressing-room were robes of green velvet edged with gold. In the dining-room the table was covered with the richest food. And the cellars were filled with gold. When the angel had shown him all these things he left him. But the Laird noticed that he locked the door of the palace as he went out.

A year went past. Ten, twenty, a hundred years went past. And still the banquets were spread. And the rich dresses were provided. And the cellars remained full of gold. But the Laird was not so happy as he had expected to be.

One day he heard a key turn in the lock, and the angel entered. "How are you getting on in your marble palace?" said the angel. The Laird replied, "I did not expect heaven would be dull like this." "Heaven!" exclaimed the angel. "You surely do not think that this is heaven? You are in hell." The Laird began to tremble. "Could I see heaven from here?" he asked. The angel led him up to the top-most tower of the palace, and drew out a slate. A ray of the most beautiful light came through, and made all the colours of the rainbow on the walls of the tower. "If you fix your eye at that opening, and let it travel

along the ray of light, at the far end of it you will have a glimpse of heaven." Standing on his tiptoes, he steadied his eye at the open space and looked. Far away he beheld a throne, the most glorious he had ever dreamed or heard of, and on the throne a form more beautiful than he had words to describe. And he also saw sitting on a footstool near the throne the hind he had despised, gazing at the face of God, and his own face filled with signs of peace and joy. He was about to put some more questions to the angel when he found that he was gone, and even at that moment locking the palace door. A great horror took hold of him. He felt himself trembling from head to foot. He tried to cry on the angel to come back, but not a sound would come into his lips. The last thing of his dream he remembered was that he fell on the floor of the tower room and hid his face in his hands.

When he awoke he found himself still sitting in the boat. His head had fallen on his poor neighbour's shoulder, and the kind man had made a pillow for it there. How thankful the Laird now felt that he was still on this side of the grave! How sinful now seemed to him the pride which wanted a marble palace instead of God! And how poor and mean looked in his own eyes the arrogance and hard-heartedness with which he had regarded the humble hind!

I do not know all that happened to the Laird in his after life. But on that Sunday evening, when the boat got back into the harbour, he asked the poor hind to

come up with him to his house and dine with him. Then, when they were alone, he asked him to pray for him. And when they were about to part, he lifted the hand of the poor hind to his lips and kissed it gently.

It was observed in after days, when the Laird prayed with his family, that every morning he asked for grace to enable him and his that day to set their hearts on the things of God. And that is the prayer I commend to each of you. Ask help from God to wish from the heart the things which He would have you to wish; the things which are at His right hand in the heavenly places. That is the wish you will be glad to have wished when your earthly life is ended; that also is the wish whose fulfilment will be your portion in the very heaven of God.





CARLO.

TWO PORTIONS.

- I. "THOUGH YE HAVE LIEN AMONG THE POTS."
- II. "WINGS OF A DOVE COVERED WITH SILVER."

CARLO.

TWO PORTIONS.

I.

“THOUGH YE HAVE LIEN AMONG THE POTS.”



FEW years ago a book was published by a lady, in which she made many things which are in the Bible plain, by telling what she had seen in the land where the Bible was written. Among the things made plain by her was the verse in Psalm lxviii.—“Though ye have lien among the pots, yet ye shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.”

In the land where the Bible was written the houses have flat roofs. People go up there in the cool evenings to sit. Sometimes they sleep there ; and sometimes they cook their food there.

When the food is cooked on the roof, the fire is built in a corner ; the pots and pans are kept in that corner ; and, of course, there is always a heap of soot and ashes there.

Now the nights are sometimes very cold in that land,

and doves like to have a warm bed to sleep in, and they are wise enough to find out and like the warm corner on the house-tops where the fires have been. And although it is not very tidy or clean there, it is warm, and they fold their wings and lie down in the ashes beside the pots and pans, and go to sleep; and very soon their beautiful wings are soiled and blackened with ashes and soot.

One morning, when this lady had been sleeping on the roof of the house where she was staying, she happened to wake very early, and as she was looking about her and at the beautiful sky, she saw some doves that had been sleeping in the fireplace waking up, rising from their bed of ashes, and shooting out and up in the morning air. And as they flew past she noticed that the morning light fell so richly on their wings that they shone like silver and gold.

Then she remembered this verse in the sixty-eighth Psalm. The very thing she was looking at had been seen hundreds of years before by the singer who first sang that psalm. He had said to himself, just as this lady said, "That is a picture of the change which takes place when God drops down His blessing on any humble life." Yes, just that way shine the lives of poor mothers and mothers' children when God visits their lowly homes with the glad tidings of His love. He brings them out into the light. He covers them with the light. They become His children, and everything in them and about them is changed. They are

like the doves that have been sleeping among the ashes, with wings all soiled by their humble bed among the pots, soaring into the beautiful light of the morning, until the soiled wings shine as if covered with silver, and the feathers as with yellow gold.

I once heard of a poor boy of whose life this verse is almost the very story, and to whom on two occasions it came as if sent from God Himself. He had been brought over from Savoy to sweep chimneys in London. I am afraid he was stolen and sold to do this work. It was a hard time for boys like him. They had to rise in the early morning, before the people of the city had begun to wake, and go out with a brush in their hand and a bag on their back, barefooted, winter and summer, after their masters, along the silent streets, crying, "Chimneys to sweep—sweep—sweep!" But, far worse than that, they had to go up the chimneys, from the fireplace inside to the chimney-pot on the roof, brushing all the way. Sometimes, in the cold mornings, perhaps only half awake, the little fellows would be afraid to go up all alone into the dark and narrow chimney; and too often when this befell they were beaten and compelled to go up. Many and many a time when I myself was a boy have I met those tiny little chaps in the street, with white channels on their black cheeks, where the tears had been running down.

I do not know that Carlo, whose story I am telling, was ever beaten by his master; but he was often

spoken to very harshly. He was not very well fed. He had to sleep in a miserable bed. His clothes were very thin, and soiled, and poor; and he was as lonesome as any boy ever was in London. He knew no one. His father, if he was living still, was far away in Savoy. His mother was dead. He had never been to school; he did not even know the A B C. The only pleasure he had was playing marbles with boys as poor as himself.

There was one thing, however, in Carlo's life, poor and wretched though his lot was, which was better to him than money or fine clothes. God had put a great hunger for school learning into his heart. As he went along the streets and saw the shop-signs, he often said to himself, "Some day I hope to be able to read these signs."

And the day came, sooner than he hoped for, when he was to make a beginning in this learning. It was a bright day in summer. His morning's work was over; he had been to his master's place with his bag and brush; and now, with the soot rubbed off his face and shaken out of his hair, he was going some errand for his master's wife. He had to cross a large square in which there was a public school. Just then the boys had their play-hour, and it was the time for marbles. Little groups were scattered about, kneeling and bending over their game, and some of the school-books had been thrown on the ground, and were being blown open by the wind.

It was the first time Carlo had seen a school-book, or, except through a bookseller's window, any book. He stopped, he knelt down, he looked at what seemed to him the strange forms of the letters. And the desire came strongly into his heart that he also might have the blessing which those boys who were playing had, and one day be able to read their books. Just then, however, the boy whose book he was bending over saw the black figure near it, and came up and gave him a scolding for looking at his books. The poor Savoyard at first started up, and shrank back afraid and sorry, and was about to pass on, when a thought came into his mind in a moment, and in his broken English he spoke it out: "I am sorry! I did not mean to soil your book; but if you will turn over the leaves and let me see to the end I will give you some marbles." The boy went into that proposal at once and got the marbles. And then the sweep-boy said, "I should so like to learn to read a book. I will come every day at this hour if you will teach me the letters, and I will give you a marble for every letter I learn." This bargain also was struck, and the little man soon began to get well on in the alphabet. But the book in which he had his lessons began also to have some marks of sooty fingers, and his boy-teacher told him that he was being scolded in the school, and could not teach him any more.

Carlo was very sad, and it was a day or two before his sadness grew less. But just then he remembered

that there was a churchyard near the square, and that the headstones were covered with letters. He went back to the boy who had taught him, gave him a handful of marbles he had won that morning, and asked if he would come for five minutes every day to the cemetery and teach him from the stones. And he did. And other boys came to think it good play to help. And by-and-by the poor Savoyard knew letters and was able to read the smaller words on the stones.

II.

"WINGS OF A DOVE COVERED WITH SILVER."

THE story I am telling you takes us back to the time when Sunday-schools began to be held in London. By some means or other Carlo found his way to a Sunday-school. Here it was his good hap to have a kind teacher, a working joiner, who took an interest in him, and helped him to learn to read. And before long he could read the easy verses in the Gospels pretty well.

The teacher's son was about Carlo's own age, but was attending a public school. He was a very kind lad, and used to tell the poor Savoyard what fine doings they sometimes had at school. One Sunday he came to him in great glee, and said the school was to go in procession with other schools to St. Paul's Cathedral on Holy Thursday, and it was to be a holiday. And then he said, "And you will come also,

Carlo ; it will be fine to be there." Carlo resolved to be there. It wanted some weeks to the time, but he began to get ready for the coming joy. His master gave him liberty for that day, and the master's wife said she would see to his having a pair of shoes and a cap. And at last the day came, and Carlo was early at St. Paul's.

But it was one thing to be allowed to attend a Sunday-school in a back court of the City and in a poor room, and another thing to be allowed to enter St. Paul's on Holy Thursday. Carlo's Sunday clothes were only a little better than those he wore on weekdays, and they bore marks by which any one could see that the wearer of them was an apprentice sweep. Although he had washed his hands and face, he had to do it without soap, and they also bore some marks of his daily labours. To look at him, it must be said Carlo was anything but clean. But he did not know this. He had done the best he could to be clean, and he came up to the door through which the schools were passing in, and went forward to enter. Alas ! a sharp rude blow was dealt him by the staff of one of the doorkeepers, and in an angry voice the man ordered him to stand back and let the school children in. Never before did Carlo realize how far he was from good things. He was not good enough even to enter a church. The tears started into his eyes. The day he had so long looked forward to was to be for him a day of misery. He had not courage to make a second

attempt to enter. He turned aside and sat down on one of the gravestones with a heavy and sad heart. Meanwhile the procession of children passed in; hundreds and thousands went in. And then the service began.

Just at that time there was living in London a very wonderful man, a painter of great pictures and also a poet. His name was William Blake. He must have seen the children marching into St. Paul's.

As far as I can make out by the dates of my story, it was in that very year that this painter-poet wrote his great song called "Holy Thursday," in which he describes the procession :—

"'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
Came children walking two and two, in red and blue and green,
Grey-headed beadles walked before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of St. Paul's they like Thames waters flow."

But poor Carlo had neither red nor blue nor green to put on. And it was one of those grey-headed beadles who so cruelly struck him with his staff. As he sat there he fairly broke down. It was like being shut out of heaven. His thoughts went away far back into a happier time in Savoy. He remembered being taken once by his mother into a building larger and grander even than St. Paul's, and no one had offered to shut him out then. But those days were gone. His mother was dead ; he was a stranger and an outcast now in a strange land.

It was rather cold where he had taken up his seat,

and he went round to the sunny side of the cathedral, and sat down beneath a window where he could hear the organ play. Just inside there, as it happened, the choir was placed, and the anthem that day had been chosen from the sixty-eighth Psalm. It was only the sound he could hear when the whole choir sang. But now and again single voices took up the words, and these fell on his ear with great distinctness. And thus, to this poor child that day came to comfort him the words which have led me to tell this story, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." It was as if the words had been sent to him direct from God. He could not quite understand their meaning; he only understood that they were words for such as he. It was because he had been lying among the pots that he was shut out from the church that morning. And now God was speaking to him by the words of the singer who sang that verse of the psalm.

A new feeling took hold of him. In a dim way he felt that God would not shut him out. He waited till the service was over and the school in which his friend was had marched past, and then went home.

And it was none too soon that he went home. Everything there was in a confusion. A fire had broken out in the City, and the master had been sent for to help to put it out. Carlo was to come after him as soon as he returned. He had taken very little food

in the morning, and although he was both hungry and faint now, he had to change his clothes and hurry after his master as fast as he could. The moment he arrived his master ordered him to climb a neighbouring roof, and pour the buckets of water which would be sent up to him on that. But to that very roof, as soon as he had reached it, the wind began to bend the flames. When he took his place on the ridge the smoke and the heat were stifling. And soon it was plain that this house also would be burned. The master shouted to the boy to come down, but the crackling of the fire and the hubbub of the noise below drowned it, so that Carlo never heard. And then, as I said, he was faint with hunger and not able to decide for himself. He waited for the buckets which never came up. The master got to be busy at other parts of the fire, and forgot that the boy had not come down. And there the child sat, waiting to do the work he had been sent up to do, unable to move because he had been ordered there, the flames all the while coming nearer and nearer every moment. Should he go down? He knew he would be beaten if the water were carried up and he not there. He shouted as loud as he could for the water, but the noise of the fire drowned his voice too.

What happened after that he never could tell. Whether he fell from the top, or was carried down on the falling roof, nobody knew. A fireman found him among the wreck in an insensible state. And when he came to himself he was in a hospital.

It was a long time before he could move his limbs. Both had been broken by the fall, and he had other hurts besides. When at length the doctor said that his bones were knit, it was only to add, "But you are not well yourself, poor boy!" He was far from well. He could not sleep at nights for pains in his breast. He was not able to take his food, and by-and-by it became plain to everybody who saw him that Carlo would never leave that bed alive.

Yet that was, perhaps, the happiest time of his life. The Sunday-school teacher, whose son had been so kind to him, and who had helped him to read the Bible, came to see him two or three times a week. And always he spent a part of Sunday afternoon at his bedside. He could not speak much to Carlo, but he had kind ways with him, and used to read nice verses from the Bible. The boy thought to himself, that if Jesus had been in London he would have done just as this kind visitor did. And once or twice he let out that that thought was in his mind. At one visit the poor boy's face was covered over with beads of sweat, and the teacher took his handkerchief and gently wiped the face dry. The sufferer looked up and whispered, "Jesus would have done that too." Another time his friend took him a basket of sponge-cake and some strawberries, and made a little feast for the two. Carlo said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

But meanwhile he was sinking fast. He had been

six months in the hospital ; the winter was drawing near ; the nights were getting cold ; but his visitor never failed to come. One Sunday he found Carlo asleep, and he sat at the bedside till he should wake up. As he sat there, he could not help watching the white pinched face on the pillow. A flush was just then touching the cheeks, and something like a smile was moving over the lips. And then the eyes opened. "I knew it was you," he said, "I have been seeing you in a dream. And such a happy dream it was !" Then, between spasms of pain, almost by single syllables at a time, he told his dream.

He was in the presence of a great church, greater than St. Paul's, as great and beautiful as the church his mother took him to when a child. It was summer time ; the birds were singing ; the grass was white with flowers. As he stood there, troops of children began to arrive and to pass into the church. They were dressed in the most lovely dresses he had ever seen, and were smiling and singing as they went past. He also wished to enter, but remembered that he was covered with sooty clothes. But a strange thing happened. He seemed to see himself, all black and grimy, going up timidly to the door and pleading to get in. And he noticed, as the black-robed child stood there, that the great doors of the church were thrown open, and an angel came out and touched him. He saw the blackness passing away. He saw the angel covering the boy with a white and shining robe. He

saw him taking the boy by the hand and leading him in. And just at that moment he heard sung by a single voice in the choir, as he had heard six months before, but more sweetly, the words, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." "But, dear teacher, the great sight was this, I thought that angel was just like you."

That was the last visit the teacher had to make to his poor scholar. Carlo died next day, and I am sure he went to that very Saviour whom he had learned to know, partly from reading about him in the Gospel and partly from seeing Him—or thinking he saw Him—in the face and words and acts of his gentle teacher.



A LITTLE BIRD'S SONG.

A LITTLE BIRD'S SONG.



It is only a little story I am to tell you to-day. It is a story I found in a ballad. But whether it is a parable story, or something that really happened, I must not say. It is a good story either way ; and it is true at the heart.

It is the story of Peter Forshegrund, a holy man, who lived with other holy men in a house at the edge of a forest, hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

Although Peter was a man in years, and, as you will see, a holy man, he was only a child in understanding. He had the thoughts of a child. And specially he had one thought which almost every child, at some time or another, has. It was the thought of eternity. As he walked among the trees in the forest he kept thinking to himself, how long eternity must be. And he would say, "A hundred years is nothing to it, nor a hundred to that. It is hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of years."

Now this was not an idle thought. Peter knew that eternity and heaven were joined together, and his idea of heaven was, that it was endless praising of God. And what troubled him was this—and it was only

about himself he was troubled—that in the long flow of the years that never end, he might become weary of praising God.

“I am not so holy as the others beside me are,” he thought. “There will be no danger for them of tiring in their songs ; but for me, so weak as I am, there will be danger. For eternity is long—so long, and to be ever, ever, praising God might at last tire out my spirit.”

Thinking this thought one day, and indeed, being very much burdened in spirit about it, he went out to walk among the trees of the forest. It was spring-time, the new buds and little leaves were twinkling on the branches ; the sun was shining overhead and the air was fresh and warm. Peter's heart rose up in thanks to God. “What a beautiful world it is,” he said ; “how kind is the good God to give us a world so fair ! Those trees are pictures of Himself ; they stand up so straight, so strong, so beautiful ; and the birds make their home among their branches, just as we should make our home in His love. And here is spring once more on the earth ; winter is gone, and the time of the singing of birds has come.” Even as he was saying these things to himself, the birds were singing their joyous songs as they flew hither and thither building their nests. “If earth be so beautiful,” he said, “how much more beautiful heaven must be !”

But just then, along with this thought, came in that other which troubled him, and he felt himself once more wondering whether in heaven it would not, by-

and-by, after a long while perhaps, but too certainly during the eternal years, become a weariness to feeble spirits like his, to be always, always singing to God.

While this thought was passing through his mind, he heard a sound such as he had never heard before ; it filled the woods and sent its echoes far and near. It was a little bird that God had sent to him from heaven. Such a song never was sung by bird before ; so soft, so clear, and low and loud by turns. It was as if an angel sang ; it was as if everything in heaven and earth had begun to sing ; or as if the resurrection morning were come, and risen saints were singing for joy that they had left their graves. Peter could not listen enough ; ears and eyes, and heart and body, were ravished by the little bird and its song. He felt as he had never felt in his life before ; he seemed not to be walking in the wood at all, but on the clouds ; and the whole place seemed to him to be bathed in the light of the presence of God.

However, at last, the sun began to set ; the shadows of evening were gathering : he remembered that it would be time for Evensong, and he forced himself away from the music and hurried back to the house.

As he approached he saw that everything was changed a little. It was the same house and yet not the same. At the gate he met a young man dressed in the same kind of dress he himself had ; but his face he had never seen. As Peter was about to open the gate the young man said to him, " Who are you ? You act like one at

home here, yet you are a stranger." "I?" said Peter, in great astonishment; "I am Peter Forschgrund. And this has been my house for years." "Forschgrund! Peter Forschgrund!" answered the young man, trying to remember a name he had once heard. "That is the name of the holy man who went out from this house more than a thousand years ago to meditate and pray in the forest, and never came back."

Awhile good Peter stood amazed,
Then eyes and hands to heaven he raised :—
"O God, how plain is now revealed
The folly in this heart concealed !
Thy sinful servant dared to deem
Eternity too long might seem,
Spent in the sunshine of Thy face
In showing forth Thy endless praise.
And yet when Thou didst condescend
One heavenly messenger to send,
Only a bird from paradise,
Singing of resurrection bliss,
While hearing that enchanting lay,
As if but half a summer day,
A thousand years have passed away !"

If the thought which troubled Peter Forschgrund troubles any child to whom I speak to-day, the years will come when God will help you to put it away. There will be no weariness in heaven. God has other ways of employing His children besides singing His praise. But whatever our employments may be, neither in praise nor in service shall we grow faint or weary. Pleasant though it is to be young and on earth, it will be more pleasant in heaven. And the happiest

hours you have ever had here will seem less happy than the joyful times which await you there. For the heart there will be filled with the sense of God's love to us, and with love to Christ who opened the gate of heaven to us. And to have those two loves in the heart is to have the life of heaven.



THE GOLDEN AGE.

SIX PORTIONS.

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THE GOLDEN AGE.

SIX PORTIONS.

I.

THE KING'S CHILDREN.



HERE was once, in Christendom, a little kingdom where the people were pious and simple-hearted. In their simplicity they held for true many things at which people of great kingdoms smile. One of these things was what is called the "Golden Age."

There was not a peasant in the villages, nor a citizen in the cities, who did not believe in the Golden Age. If they happened to hear of anything great that had been done in former times, they would say, "That was in the Golden Age." If anybody spoke to them of a good thing he was looking for in years to come, they would say, "Then shall be the Golden Age." And if they should be speaking of something happy or good which was going on under their eyes, they always said, "Yes, the Golden Age is there."

Now, words like these do not come to people in a

day. And these words about the Golden Age did not come to the people of that ancient kingdom in a day. More than a hundred years before, there was reigning over the kingdom a very wise king, whose name was Pakronus. And to him one day came the thought, and grew from little to more in his mind, that some time or other there must have been, and some time or other there would be again, for his people and for all people a "Golden Age."

"Other ages," he said, "are silver, or brass, or iron ; but one is a Golden Age." And I suppose he was thinking of that Age when he gave names to his three sons, for he called them YESTERGOLD, GOLDENDAY, and GOLDMORROW. Sometimes when he talked about them, he would say, "They are my three captains of the Golden Age." He had also a little daughter whom he greatly loved. Her name was FAITH.

These children were very good. And they were clever as well as good. But like all the children of that old time, they remained children longer than the children of now-a-days. It was many years before their school days came to an end, and when they ended they did not altogether cease to be children. They had simple thoughts and simple ways, just like the people of the kingdom. Their father used to take them up and down through the country, to make them acquainted with the lives of the people. "You shall some day be called to high and difficult tasks in the kingdom," he said to them, "and you should prepare

yourselves all you can." Almost every day he set their minds a-thinking, how the lives of the people could be made happier, and hardly a day passed on which he did not say to them, that people would be happier the nearer they got to the Golden Age. In this way the children came early to the thought that, one way or other, happiness would come into the world along with the Golden Age.

But always there was one thing they could not understand: that was the time when the Golden Age should be.

About the Age itself they were entirely at one. They could not remember a year in their lives when they were not at one in this. As far back as the days when, in the long winter evenings, they sat listening to the ballads and stories of their old nurse, they had been lovers and admirers of that Age. "It was the happy Age of the world," the nurse used to say. "The fields were greener, the skies bluer, the rainbows brighter than in other Ages. It was the Age when heaven was near, and good angels present in every home. Back in that Age, away on the lonely pastures, the shepherds watching their flocks by night heard angels' songs in the sky. And the children in the cities, as they were going to sleep, felt the waving of angel wings in the dark. It was a time of wonders. The very birds and beasts could speak and understand what was said. And in the poorest children on the streets might be found princes and princesses in disguise."

They remembered also how often, in the mornings,

when they went down to school, their teacher chose lessons which seemed to tell of a Golden Age. They recalled the lesson about the city of pure gold that was one day to come down from heaven for men to dwell in ; and other lessons that told of happy times, when nations should learn the art of war no more, and there should be nothing to hurt or destroy in all the earth.

"Yes, my dear children," their mother would say, in the afternoon, when they told her of the teacher's lessons and nurse's stories, "Yes, there is indeed a happy age for the children of men, which is all that your nurse and teacher say. It is a happy time and a time of wonders. In that time wars cease and there is nothing to hurt or destroy. Princes and princesses in poor clothing are met in the streets, because in that Age the poorest child who is good is a child of the King of Heaven. And heaven and good angels are near, because Christ is near. It is Christ's presence that works the wonders. When He is living on the earth, and His life is in the lives of men, everything is changed for the better. There is a new heaven and a new earth. And the Golden Age has come."

II.

DIFFERENT VIEWS.

It was a great loss to these children that this holy and beautiful mother died when they were still very young. But her good teaching did not die. Her words about

the Golden Age never passed out of their minds. Whatever else they thought concerning it in after years, they always came back to this—in this they were all agreed—that it is the presence of Christ that makes the Gold of the Golden Age.

But at this point their agreement came to an end. They could never agree respecting the time of the Golden Age.

Yestergold believed that it lay in the past. In his esteem the former times were better than the present. People were simpler then, and truer to each other and happier. There was more honesty in trade, more love in society, more religion in life. Many an afternoon he went alone into the old abbey, where the tombs of saintly ladies, of holy men, and of brave fighters lay, and as he wandered up and down looking at their marble images, the gates of the Golden Age seemed to open up before him. There was one figure, especially, before which he often stood. It was the figure of a Crusader, his sword by his side, his hands folded across his breast, and his feet resting on a lion. "Ay," he would say, "in that Age the souls of brave men really trod the lion and the dragon under foot." But when the light of the setting sun came streaming through the great window in the west, and kindling up the picture of Christ healing the sick, his soul would leap up for joy, a new light would come into his eyes, and this thought would rise within him like a song—"The Golden Age itself—the Age into which all other Ages open and look back—is pictured there."

But on such occasions, as he came out of the abbey and went along the streets, if he met the people hastening soiled and weary from their daily toils, the joy would go out of his heart. He would begin to think of the poor lives they were leading. And he would cry within himself, "Oh that the lot of these toiling crowds had fallen on that happy Age! It would have been easy then to be good. Goodness was in the very air blessed by His presence. The people had but to see Him to be glad." And sometimes his sorrow would be for himself. Sometimes, remembering his own struggles to be good, and the difficulties in his way, and how far he was from being as good as he ought to be, he would say, "Would that I myself had been living when Jesus was on the earth." More or less this wish was always in his heart. It had been in his heart from his earliest years. Indeed it is just a speech of his, made when he was a little boy, which has been turned into the hymn we so often sing :—

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children, as lambs, to His fold,
I should like to have been with him then.

"I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me,
That I might have seen His kind looks when He said,
'Let the little ones come unto Me.'"

Goldmorrow's thoughts were different. They went forward into the future. He had hardly any of Yestergold's difficulties about being good. He did not

think much about his own state. What took up all his thoughts was the state of the world in which his brothers and he were living. How was that to be made better? As he went up and down in his father's kingdom, he beheld hovels in which poor people had to live, and drink-shops, and gambling-houses, and prisons. He was always asking himself, how are evils like these to be put away? Whatever good any Age of the past had had, these things had never been cast out. He did not think poorly of the Age when Christ was on the earth. He was as pious as his brother. He loved the Lord as much as his brother. But his love went more into the future than into the past. It was the Lord who was coming, rather than the Lord who had come, in whom he had joy. "The Golden Age would come when Christ returned to the earth," he said. The verses in the Bible where this coming was foretold shone like light for Goldmorrow. And often, as he read them aloud to his brothers and his sister, his eyes would kindle and he would burst out with speeches like this: "I see that happy time approaching. I hear its footsteps. My ears catch its songs. It is coming. It is on the way. My Lord will burst those heavens and come in clouds of glory, with thousands and tens of thousands in His train. And things evil shall be cast out of the kingdom. And things that are wrong shall be put right. There shall be neither squalor, nor wretched poverty, nor crime, nor intemperance, nor ignorance, nor hatred, nor war. All men

shall be brothers. Each shall be not for himself but for the kingdom. And Christ shall be Lord of all."

In these discussions Goldenday was always the last to speak. And always he had least to say. I have been told that he was no great speaker. But my impression is that he got so little attention from his brothers when he spoke, that he got into the way of keeping his thoughts to himself. But everybody knew that he did not agree with either of his brothers. His belief was that the present Age, with all its faults, was the Golden Age for the people living in it. And there is no doubt that that was the view of his sister Faith. For when at any time he happened to let out even the tiniest word with that view in it, she would come closer to him, lean up against his side, and give him a hidden pressure of the hand.

III.

SEARCH FOR THE GOLDEN AGE.

When these views of the young princes came to be known, the people took sides, some with one prince, some with another. The greatest number sided with Yestergold, a number not so great with Goldmorrow, and a few, and these for the most part of humble rank, with Goldenday. In a short time nothing else was talked about, from one end of the kingdom to the other, but the time of the Golden Age. And this became a trouble to the King.

Now there happened to be living at that time in the palace a wise man, a high Councillor of State, whom the King greatly esteemed, and whose counsel he had often sought. To him in his trouble the King turned for advice.

"Let not this trouble thee, O King," the Councillor said. "Both for the princes and the people it is good that thoughts on this subject should come out into talk. But let the thoughts be put to the test. Let the princes, with suitable companions, be sent forth to search for this Age of Gold. Although the Age itself, in its very substance, is hid with God, there is a country in which shadows of all the Ages are to be seen. In that country, the very clouds in the sky, the air which men breathe, and the hills and woods and streams shape themselves into images of the life that has been, or is to be among men. And whosoever reaches that country and looks with honest, earnest eyes, shall see the Age he looks for, just as it was or is to be, and shall know concerning it whether it be his Age of Gold. At the end of a year, let the travellers return, and tell before your Majesty and an assembly of the people the story of their search." To this counsel the King gave his assent. And he directed his sons to make choice of their companions and prepare for their journey.

Yestergold, for his companions, chose a painter and a poet. Goldmorrow preferred two brothers of the Order of Watchers of the Sky. But Goldenday said, "I shall be glad if my sister Faith will be companion to me." And so it was arranged.

Just at that time the King was living in a palace among the hills. And it was from thence the travellers were to leave. It was like a morning in Wonderland. The great valley on which the palace looked down, and along which the princes were to travel, was that morning filled with vapour. And the vapour lay, as far as the eye could reach, without a break on its surface, or a ruffled edge, in the light of the rising sun, like a sea of liquid silver. The hills that surrounded the palace looked like so many giants sitting on the shores of a mighty sea. It was into this sea the travellers had to descend. One by one, with their companions, they bade the old King farewell. And then, stepping forth from the palace gates and descending towards the valley, they disappeared from view.

The country to which they were going lay many days' distance between the Purple Mountains and the Green Sea. The road to it lay through woods and stretches of corn and pasture land. It was Autumn. In every field were reapers cutting or binding the corn. At every turn of the road were waggons laden with sheaves. Then the scene changed. The land became poor. The fields were covered with crops that were thin and unripe. The people who passed on the road had a look of want on their faces. The travellers passed on. Every eye was searching the horizon for the first glimpse of the mountain peaks. In every heart was the joyful hope of finding the Golden Age. Can you think what the joy of a young student going for the first

time to a university is? It was a joy like his. While this joy was in their hearts, the road passed into a mighty forest. And suddenly among the shadows of the trees a miserable spectacle crossed their path. It was a crowd of peasants of the very poorest class. A plague had fallen on their homes, and they were fleeing from their village, which lay among the trees a mile or two to the right.

Yestergold was the first to meet them. He was filled with anguish. His sensitive nature could not bear to see suffering in others. He shrank from the very sight of misery. Turning to his companions, he said, "If the Lord of Life had been travelling on this road as He was on that other, long ago, when the Widow of Nain met Him with her dead son, He would have destroyed the plague by a word." "Oh, holy and beautiful Age!" exclaimed the poet, "why dost thou lie in thy soft swathings of light, and power to do mighty deeds, so far behind us in the past?" "But let us use it as a golden background," said the painter. "That is the beautiful Age on which Art is called to portray the Divine form of the Great Physician!" Saying these fine words, the party rode swiftly past.

The terrified villagers were still streaming across the road when Goldmorrow came up. Nothing could exceed the pity which the spectacle stirred in his breast. Tears streamed from his eyes. The bareness, the poverty, the misery of the present time seemed to come into view and gather into a point in what he saw.

"Oh!" he cried to his companions, "if Christ were only come! Only He could deal with evils so great as these!" Then, withdrawing his thoughts into himself, and still moved with his humane pity, he breathed this prayer to Christ: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, and lay Thy healing hand on the wounds and sorrows of the world." His companions were also touched with what they saw. And in earnest and reverent words one of them exclaimed: "Blessed hope! Light of the pilgrim! Star of the weary! The earth has waited long thy absent light to see." But, by the time the words were spoken, the villagers were behind them, and, spurring their horses, the travellers hastened forward on their way.

IV.

A PLAGUE-STRICKEN VILLAGE.

The dust raised by their horses' hoofs was still floating over the highway when Goldenday, with his sister and their attendants, rode up to the spot. Two or three groups of the fugitives had made a temporary home for the night under the shelter of the trees on the left. Others were still arriving. The pale faces, the terrified looks of the villagers, filled the prince with concern. "It is the pestilence," they said, in answer to his inquiries. "The pestilence, good sir, and it is striking us dead in the very streets of our village." The prince turned to his sister. She was already

dismounted. A light was in her eye which at once went to his heart. The two understood each other. They knew that it was Christ and not merely a crowd of terrified peasants who had met them. They were His eyes that looked out at them through the tear-filled eyes of the peasantry. It was His voice that appealed to them in their cries and anguish. He seemed to be saying to them: "Inasmuch as ye do it to one of the least of these, ye do it unto Me." In a few moments the prince had halted his party and unpacked his stores, and was supplying the wants of the groups on the left. Before an hour was past he had brought light into their faces by his words of cheer, and, with his sister and his servants, was on his way to the plague-stricken village.

Most pitiable was the scene which awaited him there. People were really dying in the streets, as he had been told. Some were already dead. A mother had died in front of her cottage, and her little children sat crying beside her body. Another, with a look of despair in her eyes, sat rocking the dead body of her child. The men seemed to have fled.

The Prince's plans were soon formed. He had stores enough to last his party and himself for a year. He would share these with the villagers as far as they would go. He had tents also for the journey. He would use these for a home to his own party and for hospitals for the sick. Before the sun had set, the tents for his own party were erected on a breezy height

outside the village. And, ere the sun had arisen the next morning, the largest tent of all had been set in a place by itself, ready to receive the sick.

Goldenday and his sister never reached the country where the images of all the Ages are to be found. A chance of doing good met them on their journey, and they said to each other, "It has been sent to us by God." They turned aside that they might make it their own. They spent the year in the deeds of mercy to which it called them among the plague-stricken villagers.

It would take too long to tell all that this good Prince and his sister achieved in that year. The village lay in a hollow among dense woods and on the edge of a stagnant marsh. The Prince had the marsh drained and the woods thinned. Every house in the village was thoroughly repaired and cleaned. The sick people were taken up to the tent-hospital and cared for until they got well. The men who had fled returned. The terrified mothers ventured back. The sickness began to slacken. In a few months it disappeared. Then the Prince caused wells to be dug to supply water for drinking. Then he built airy schools for the children. Last of all he repaired the Church, which had fallen into ruin, and trained a choir of boys to sing the thanks to God. But when all these things had been accomplished, the year during which he was to have searched for the Golden Age was within a few weeks of its close. And, what was worse, it was too plain to his sister that

the Prince's health had suffered by his toils. Night and day he had laboured in his service of love. Night and day he had carried the burden of the sickness and infirmities of the stricken village in his heart. It had proved a burden greater than he could bear. He had toiled on till he saw health restored to every home. He toiled until he saw the village itself protected from a second visitation of the plague. But his own strength was meanwhile ebbing away. The grateful villagers observed with grief how heavily their deliverer had to lean on his sister's arm in walking. And tears, which they strove in vain to conceal, would gather in their eyes as they watched the voice that had so often cheered them sinking into a whisper, and the pale face becoming paler every day.

V.

RETURN OF THE SEARCHERS.

The year granted to the princes by the King had now come to a close. And he and his nobles and the chief men of his people assembled on the appointed day to welcome the princes on their return and to hear their reports concerning the time of the Golden Age.

The first to arrive was Prince Yestergold. He was accompanied to the platform on which the throne was set by the painter and poet, who had been his companions during the year. Having embraced his father, he stepped to the front and said :—

“Most high King and father beloved, and you, the honourable nobles and people of his realm, on some future occasion my two companions will, the one recite the songs in which the Age which we went to search for is celebrated, and the other exhibit the pictures in which its life is portrayed. On this occasion it belongs to me to tell the story of our search, and of what we found and of what we failed to find. We went forth to discover the time of the Golden Age. We went in the belief that it was the time when our Lord was on the earth. How often have I exclaimed in your hearing, ‘Oh that I had been born in that age! How much easier to have been a Christian then!’ I have this day, with humbleness of heart, to declare that I have found myself entirely in the wrong. I have been in the country where images of the Ages are stored. I have seen the very copy of the Age of our Lord. I was in it as if I had been born in it. I saw the scenes which those who then lived saw. I saw the crowds who moved in those scenes. I beheld the very person of the Divine Lord. And oh! my father, and oh! neighbours and friends, shall I shrink from saying to you, ‘Be thankful it is in this Age and not in that you have been born, and that you know the Lord as this Age knows Him, and not as He was seen and known in His own.’

“We arrived at Bethany on the day when Lazarus was raised. I mingled with the crowd around the grave. I saw the sisters. I was amazed to find that

nothing looked to me as I had expected it to do. Even the Lord had not the appearance of One who could raise the dead. And when the dead man came forth, I could not but mark that some who had seen the mighty miracle turned away from the spot, jeering and scoffing at the Lord, its worker.

“When I next saw the Lord He was in the hands of the scoffers who had turned away from the grave of Lazarus. He was being led along the streets of Jerusalem to Calvary. The streets on both sides were crowded with stalls, and with people buying and selling as at a fair. Nobody except a few women seemed to care that so great a sufferer was passing by. He was bending under the weight of the Cross. His face was pale and all streaked with blood. I said to myself: ‘Can this be He who is more beautiful than ten thousand?’ My eyes filled with tears. Sickness came over my heart. I was like one about to die. I hurried away from the pitiless crowd, from the terrible spectacle, from the city accursed. And straightway I turned my face towards my home. And as I came within sight of my father’s kingdom, I gave thanks to God that my lot had been cast in this favoured Age, and that the horrors through which the Lord had to pass are behind us; and that we see Him now in the story of the Gospels, as the Son of God, clothed with the glory of God, seated on the throne of heaven and making all things work together for good.”

As the Prince was bringing his speech to a close, a

distant rolling of drums announced that one of his brothers had arrived at the gates of the city. It was Goldmorrow. And in a little while he entered the hall, embraced his father, and was telling the story of his travel.

"My companions and I," he said, "have been where the Golden Age of my dreams is displayed. We have been in that far future where there is to be neither ignorance nor poverty, neither sickness nor pain, and where cruelty and oppression and war are to be no more. It is greater than my dreams. It is greater than I have words to tell. It is greater than I had eyes to see. We were not able to endure the sight of it. We felt ourselves to be strangers in a strange land. The people we met looked upon us as we look upon barbarians. Our hearts sickened. We said to each other: 'It is too high, we cannot reach up to it.' The very blessings we had come to see did not look to us like the blessings of which we had dreamed.

"But our greatest trial was still to come. The Lord had come back to the earth and was living among the people of that Age. We made our way to the palace in which He lived. It was like no palace we had ever seen. It was like great clouds piled up among the hills. We were present when the doors were thrown open. We beheld Him coming forth. But the vision of that glory smote our eyes like fire. We were not able to gaze upon it. Our hearts failed within us. This was not the Christ we had known. We shrank

back from the light of that awful presence. We fell on the ground before Him. 'God be merciful to us sinners,' we cried, 'we are not worthy to look upon Thy face.' And when we could open our eyes again the vision had passed.

"Then, O father! then, O friends beloved, I knew that I had sinned. In that moment of my humiliation and shame I recalled a sight which I had seen in the first days of my journey. I remembered some peasants fleeing from a plague-stricken village, whom we had passed. I said to myself, I say this day to you, we were that day at the gates of the real Golden Age and we did not know it. We might that day have turned aside to the help of these peasants, but we missed the golden chance sent to us by God."

VI.

THE FINDER OF THE AGE.

When Goldmorrow had finished, a strain of the most heavenly music was heard. It sounded as if it were coming towards the assembly hall from the gates of the city. It was like the chanting of a choir of angels, and the sounds rose and fell as they came near, as if they were blown hither and thither by the evening wind. In a little while the singing was at the doorway of the hall, and every eye was turned in that direction. A procession of white-robed children entered first. Behind them came a coffin, carried on men's shoulders,

and covered with wreaths of flowers. Then, holding the pall of the coffin, came in the Princess Faith, behind her the attendants who had accompanied her brother and herself, and last of all a long line of bare-headed peasants walking two and two. It was the coffin of the Prince Goldenday. His strength had never come back to him. He had laid down his life for the poor villagers. Having fulfilled his task in their desolate home, the brave young helper sickened and died.

When this was known, the old King lifted up his voice and wept, and the princes, and the nobles, and all the people present joined in his sorrow. Then, it seemed to be found out, that the dead Prince had been of the three brothers the most beloved. Then, when the weeping had continued for a long time, the Princess Faith stepped forward, and in few words told the story of the year. Then silence, only broken by bursts of sorrow, fell upon all. And then the Councillor rose up from his seat at the right hand of the King, and said :

"We have heard, O King, the words of the Princes who searched the Past and the Future for the Age of Gold. The lips that should have spoken for the Age we are living in are for ever closed ; but in the beautiful statement of our Princess we have heard the story they had to tell.

"Can there be even one in this great assembly, who has listened to the story of the Princess, and does not know that the Age of Gold is found, and that it was found by the Prince whose dead body is here ?

“O King, and ye princes and peers and people, it was the daily teaching of the Sainted Lady, our Queen, that the Golden Age is the time when Christ is present in our life. In every form in which Christ’s presence can be felt, it was felt in the village for whose helping the dear Prince laid down his life.

“A time of great misery had come to that village. The harvest, year after year, had failed. Poverty fell upon the people. Then, last and worst of all, came the pestilence. Through the story told by the beloved Princess we can see that faith in God began to fail. The people cried out in their agony: ‘Has God forgotten?’ And some, ‘Is there a God at all?’

“It was in the thick darkness of that time the Prince visited them. He met them fleeing from their home. He gave up his own plans that he might help them. His coming into the village, into the very thick of its misery, was like the morning dawn. He was summer heat and summer cheer to the people. The clouds of anxiety and of terror began to lift. The shadow of death was changed for them into the morning. He made himself one with them. He went from house to house with cheer and help. The burden seemed less heavy, the future less dark, that this helper was by their side. Best of all, faith came back to them. It was as if the Lord had come back. In a real sense He had come back. He was present in His servant the Prince. The people beheld the form of the Son of God going about their streets doing good. They saw the old

miracles. The blind saw, the deaf heard God, as in the days when Jesus was in the flesh. Even death was conquered before their eyes. A real gleam of heaven is falling this evening on the once-darkened village. The evil things that infested its life have been cast out, and a new heaven and a new earth have come to it. It is the Golden Age come down to them from God.

“In his great task the dear Prince died. Our hearts are heavy for that we shall see his face no more. But count it not strange that he died, or that this trial should have descended on our King and us. It is the rule in the kingdom of our Lord. Whoever will bring the Golden Age where sin is, must himself lay down his life. For those peasants, as Christ for all mankind, the Prince laid down his life.”

The people listened till the Councillor reached these words, then, as by one impulse, they rose and burst into a grand doxology. Then, a company of torch-bearers entered. Then, the children took up their place at the head of the coffin and began again to sing. The bearers lifted the coffin. The King and Faith and the two princes followed; after them the peasants from the village, then the chief nobles and the people, and in this order the coffin was carried to the place of the dead.

In the course of years the wise Pakronus died, and Yestergold became King. He made his brother Prime Minister. And the two brothers became really what their father called them when boys—“Captains of the Golden Age.” In everything that was for the good of

the people, they took the lead. They were Captains in every battle with sin and misery. What Goldenday did for the plague-stricken village, they strove to do for the whole kingdom. Their Sister Faith gave herself to the building and care of schools and hospitals. And the time in which those three lived is described in all the histories of that kingdom as a Golden Age.

It is told by travellers who have visited the Royal city, that a statue of the Prince Goldenday stands above the old gateway of the abbey, and that there are written below it the words :

“TO-DAY IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE.”



THE COMMON SALVATION.



THE COMMON SALVATION.



HERE was a boy in Cromarty once called Hugh Miller. He was an apprentice mason, and was taken by his master to work in a quarry. One day he happened to see a little round rough stone on the ground, and he took his hammer and split it into two. To his surprise and joy, he beheld inside a picture of the bones of a tiny fish, and a shadow of the very fish itself. It had once been a real fish, and this stone was its tomb. Once it lived and swam like other fish in some stream. And then, on an evil day, it was wrapped round by dust of lime, and shut in, until the moment, hundreds, perhaps thousands of years after, when the Cromarty boy brought it out again into the light, its flesh all wasted away, its bones turned into stone, and only a shadow of its form remaining.

The boy felt as if he had suddenly passed into fairy land. He could not have been more astonished if he had found a king's palace. Here was a rough-looking pebble at his feet, and yet inside of it was this picture of the fish, silently telling the story of its life and death.

Now it is to a little heap of pebbles like that I should liken this Epistle of Jude, which we have read for our lesson to-day. It is a rough, hard to read, hard to understand part of the New Testament. It is not easy reading for grown-up people. It is far from easy reading to you ; but it has many beautiful sayings in it. It has single verses which have been a comfort to the people of God ever since they were written. And it has one saying which even children should be able to understand. It is a saying in the verse in which Jude declares that he had given all diligence to write unto them of the Common Salvation.

"The Common Salvation"—that is the saying which a child may understand, and in which I wish to help you to be glad. It lies in the heart of this third verse as beautiful, as great a miracle, as the picture which Hugh Miller found in the heart of his pebble. And it has a far finer story to tell.

It tells the story of the good thing which Jesus brought down from heaven. And what it tells concerning that good thing is that it is "common"—"the common salvation." Will you try to understand what is meant when a good thing like salvation is described as common? Sometimes on the summer evenings I am so fortunate as to meet you walking like myself on the moor. Did you ever think of asking why the moor is called "the common"? It is because it is common property. It is ground that belongs to everybody. All the people of the town have the use of it,

to walk on, as if it were their own ; and the poor cottagers living around the edge of it may bring their cows and donkeys, their sheep and geese, to feed on it. It is common to us all.

In the same way is this good thing which has come down from heaven common to us all. It is the common salvation ; it is common to rich and poor, to black people and white. It is the one same salvation by which everybody who will may be saved. The saved who are now in heaven were saved by it. The saved who are still on the earth have been saved by it. It is salvation for the whole world—for whosoever will have it.

And that is the same thing with saying that Christ is a Saviour for everybody—for every soul who is willing to have Him. He is the common Saviour, the Saviour free to all the world, whom all the world may have. A Saviour not of good people only, nor of bad people only ; but of good people and bad people in common : the Saviour in whom bad people will find salvation from their badness, in whom good people will find salvation goodness better than the goodness they have. The common Saviour. The Saviour whom everybody may have and be brought to heaven by. That is what is meant when it is said, that the good thing brought down from heaven by Jesus is the common salvation. It is the same thing as is meant in that verse where it is said : " Let him that is athirst come : and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Now to help you to understand how good for us it is that there is a common salvation, I will tell you one of the wonderful stories in the Acts of the Apostles. At the time when the things took place which are told in the Acts, a man was in Ethiopia who was very anxious to be saved. The wish to be saved was in him like a great thirst in his heart. But there were two things that stood like a wall in his way. He thought that it was only in Jerusalem salvation was to be found, and that it was only Jews who could find it. Now he was not a Jew, but a far-off Ethiopian. He had money; he had horses and chariots; he had friends; the Queen of Ethiopia was his friend; but he was without salvation. A great sorrow lay upon his soul. At last he resolved to go to Jerusalem and see whether it could not be got. He thought, "If only I go near the Temple of the Jews I may be admitted among the saved." But it was not so. He came to Jerusalem. He saw the Temple. He got a Bible. But he was not admitted among the saved. The wall was in Jerusalem too. Salvation was only for the Jews, he thought; only for white people, and he was a Gentile and black. So with a heavy heart he turned his face to Ethiopia again; and he left Jerusalem, and was on the very road that led to his home. But God was watching over this earnest seeking soul; He sent Philip the Evangelist to him. And Philip told him all the new glad tidings about Christ. He told him that the wall which had divided Jews and Gentiles was

broken down ; that Christ had died for Ethiopians as well as for Jews, that He had brought down from heaven a salvation that was common, and that if he wished he might have the Saviour and salvation there and then. And there and then this Ethiopian accepted both, and in a river near by he was baptized. And then, with all his sadness gone, and with a heart filled with joy, he continued his journey home.

I want next to make plain to you that it is a very happy thing for yourselves that there is a common salvation. Sunday, I know, is sometimes a hard day for you, especially the part of it you spend in the church. Service and sermon seem long to you, and when you return to your homes you say, "We did not understand what was said." That will sometimes happen. What is plain and easy for the grown-up people will often be hard and dark for you.

But do not, for all that, allow yourselves to think that the Saviour is only for those who understand the sermon. He is the Saviour of children all the same as of grown-up people. He is the common Saviour—a Saviour for fathers and mothers, a Saviour for children as well.

I read not long since of a little girl of nine years old into whose heart came this very thought. She said to her mother one Sunday, "Is Jesus a Saviour for children of nine years old?" "But why do you ask such a question as that?" the mother said. "Because our minister was offering salvation to the big people this morning ; but he did not offer it to me."

My dear children, Christ is a Saviour for nine years old as much as for nineteen or ninety. He was nine years old Himself once. He is the common Saviour. He is the Saviour for people who have grey hairs, and for you who have still the flowing locks of youth. He has salvation for boys and girls of all ages. He has salvation for the baby in its mother's arms. And it is this very thing He meant when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

But you will not always be children. Sooner than you can imagine you will be old and grey-haired. And it may come to be, as you rise in years, that you shall be, in the good providence of God, set over homes where you will have servants under you, or over work-places where you will have work-people to rule.

If such a lot should ever fall to you, I hope that God may give you grace to remember what has been said to you to-day. Do not fall into the evil way of thinking that there is a wall dividing you from the humble people who serve you. Christ has thrown down all such walls for ever. He is the Saviour for servants as well as for those who employ them. And the salvation He died to bring near is common to them and you, and as free to them as to you. Try even now to think of the servants that do you so many services in your father's house as people for whom Jesus died. For in Christ's kingdom there is no respect of persons, and what He offers to rich and poor alike is a common salvation.

GOD EVERYWHERE.

THREE PORTIONS.

I. IN THE WOODS.

II. IN DARK PLACES.

III. IN A HOSPITAL.

“O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsit-ting and mine up-ri-sing, Thou understandest my thought a-far off. Thou com-pas-sest my path and my ly-ing down, and art ac-quainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it al-to-ge-ther. Thou hast be-set me be-hind and be-fore, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowl-edge is too won-der-ful for me ; it is high, I cannot at-tain un-to it. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit ? or whither shall I flee from Thy pre-sence ? If I ascend up into hea-ven, Thou art there : if I make my bed in hell, be-hold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morn-ing, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea : even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the dark-ness shall cover me ; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the dark-ness hideth not from Thee ; but the night shineth as the day : the dark-ness and the night are both alike to Thee.”—
PSALM cxxxix. 1-12.

GOD EVERYWHERE.

THREE PORTIONS.

I.

IN THE WOODS.



WHAT these verses teach is that God is everywhere. And surely that is a very wonderful fact. God everywhere! That means He is east, west, north, south; in heaven, on earth; on land and sea.

You could not travel or sail to a country in which He is not present. He is in all the kingdoms of the living; He is in the kingdoms of the dead. He is among the crowds on crowded streets; He is in the most lonely deserts. In homes, in schools, in workplaces—wherever the night darkens, wherever the day brightens—God is there.

And, more wonderful still, He is in the secret places of the heart, both of grown-up people and of children. Away in, away down in the soul, where thoughts arise before they come up to be shaped into words in the mouth—even there, God is present.

But that is more than a wonderful fact. It is also a very solemn fact.

It is solemn to think that there is no place, seen or unseen, where evil-doers can do evil and not be seen by God. No darkness so dark, no shadow so deep, no distance so great where God is not, and in which God does not see what is done.

When Judas went out from the supper-chamber to sell his Lord, it was already dark. Would he have gone out into the darkness to do his evil deed if he had remembered and felt that the eyes of God were upon him? Those eyes beheld him leaving the room. Those eyes followed him along the dark streets. Those eyes saw him taking the thirty pieces of silver, and those eyes were full upon him afterwards when he came into the garden with the men who were sent to lay hold on Jesus, and pointed Him out by a traitor's kiss.

But it is more than a wonderful or awful fact. It is also a very blessed and very helpful fact. It is a part of the glad tidings concerning God of which the Bible is full. What a happy thing it is to be living in a world where we cannot find a place where our best Friend is not present!

But this is one of the lessons which a child may learn in a wrong way, and I will tell you of a young American girl who learned it in this wrong way. She thought of God's being everywhere as a terror. She was filled with fear by it. If she went into a dark room, He was there; or along a dark road, He was

there. She was afraid to be left alone in her bedroom at night, under the terror of the thought that He also was in the room. That was in the days of the good Dr. Nettleton, and it was the good hap of this little girl to be brought into friendly talk with him. He told her that God was a Father, the best Friend that a child could have ; that He loved children, and that He had given a great proof of His love in sending His Son to die for them. And all the terror went out of the little heart, and joy and trust came into its place. She was no longer afraid to lie down at night, or to be in a dark place alone. "My Father is here," she would say to herself, "and He is here and everywhere to bless and help His children."

And is not this a fact to be thankful for? Our Father, who loves us, everywhere! Our Father, who sent His Son to die for us, everywhere! Sometimes families are broken up; sometimes one child has to go in one direction and another in one quite apart. What a comfort to know that along whatever path our dear ones have to travel God is by their side, and into whatever far land they may have to travel, God is there.

In an American magazine, which I sometimes read, appeared some months ago a poem that brings out a second lesson of this Psalm :—

" The wilderness a secret keeps,
Upon whose guess I go,
Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,
And yet I know, I know.

- “ Some day the viewless latch will lift,
The door of air swing wide,
To one lost chamber of the wood,
Where those shy mysteries hide.
- “ What wisdom stirs among the pines?
What song is that they sing?
Those airs that search the forest heart,
What rumours do they bring?
- “ As in the fairy tale, more loud
The ghostly music plays,
When toward the enchanted bower the prince
Draws closer, through the maze.
- “ This way it passed. The scent lies fresh,
The ferns still lightly shake,
Ever I follow hard upon,
But never overtake.
- “ To other worlds that trail leads on,
To other worlds and new,
Where they who keep the Secret here
Will keep the promise too.”

It was the “footsteps of God” whose sound made that music in the poet’s ear. He heard them in the woods, in the songs of the birds, in the murmur of the pines. A form he could not see seemed to stir the leaves of the fern beds as it passed through. It was the presence, the whisper, of God that is in all His works. It is the wonder I am calling you to open your hearts to: the sound of God’s presence everywhere. It is an echo of the Garden of Eden—a little snatch of music from the time when our first parents heard “the voice of the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day.” That music the Lord Jesus has brought back to us. Those footfalls of God

we may still hear. He has brought God near to us again and filled the earth, which is our home, with the whisper of His presence.

You will hear that song if you open your hearts for it. It is not in woods only, but in the murmur of the sea, in the ripple of the brooks, in the waving of the corn, in the very silence of the starry sky. God is everywhere. From His presence who can flee? If we ascend to heaven, He is there. If we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, we shall hear His voice, and the sense of His presence shall be in our hearts.

II.

IN DARK PLACES.

But perhaps the deepest, innermost lesson of the Psalm is a lesson for evil days. Days of that kind seem far from you just now. They will not always be far. In every life some days will be dark and dreary. Into every life, in one form or other, trouble will fall. When the evil days come to you, may you be able to recall this lesson. God is near to us, both in evil places and in evil days. He is in the deepest darkness into which we can be plunged. There is no place or time, however dark, in which His ear is not open to our cry. If everything else that is glad-some should be taken out of your life, this can never be taken out of it. If one were to say, looking at his

troubles, "Surely the darkness shall cover me," even the night shall be light for such an one.

But though I am saying this, I know that it is a lesson much easier to speak about than to let into the heart. Nobody in great trouble finds it easy at first. And I am sure there are times and places so dark that only God Himself can help us to think of God.

That was what I felt one day when I was visiting the great round castle at Lancaster, which was once the home of its mighty dukes. I saw one place in that castle which filled me with horror. It was the place in which the dukes had kept their prisoners.

It is a dungeon, deep down under the castle floor. It has neither window, nor fireplace, nor bench to sit on, nor bed. The walls, the roof, the floor, are stone. And in the centre of the floor is a great ring of iron, to which the miserable prisoners were wont to be fastened with chains, as one would fasten a dog.

It went like ice through my blood, as I stood in that dismal place with only the light of a candle to show the gloom, to think of human beings, men or women, rich or poor, led down into that terrible room, chained to that ring of iron, and left there, as in a grave, without light of sun or star, without coal or candle, without the company of friends, without a single being to speak a kind word to them, without hope, except the sad hope of being taken out some morning to be put to death.

I said to myself: "Did ever prisoners shut up in this dungeon find comfort in thinking that God was

present ? Did the cry of the afflicted ever ascend from here ? And did God answer that cry ? Did He come near to the prisoners ? Did He turn the darkness into light for any of them ? ”

The answer which came to me was that God had many times turned the darkness into light for prisoners in dungeons as dark and terrible even as the one in which I stood. Into a dungeon more terrible than that—fouler, more loathsome, and filled with crawling venomous creatures—the great prophet Jeremiah was once thrown by his enemies. There was not even a stone floor there. His enemies meant him to sink in that horrible pit and in the miry clay which was its floor. He sank. The foul waters rose up about him. He said to himself : It is the end of my life. I am cut off. But then he called upon the name of God ; and he did not call in vain. Telling the story afterwards in thankfulness to God, he said : “ I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou didst hear my voice. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee. Thou saidst, Fear not.” And the prophet ceased to fear. By His presence God turned the very darkness of the dungeon into light.

About two hundred years ago, there was living in France a holy lady, whose name was Madame Guyon. She was a writer of religious books. In her books she taught that the way to know whether God loved us or not was to look into the heart. In that country and at

that time this was thought to be a very wicked error. And she was taken from her family and shut up in the Bastille—the most terrible prison in all France.

But her cruel enemies could not shut her out from God—even in that terrible prison. She called upon God, and He came to her help. "O my God," she said to Him, "if Thou art pleased to make me a spectacle unto men and angels, Thy will be done. All that I ask is, that Thou wilt be with and save those who love Thee, so that neither life nor death, neither principalities nor powers, may ever separate them from Thy love which is in Christ Jesus. As for me, what matters it what men think of me, or what they make me suffer, since they cannot separate me from the Saviour, whose name is engraven in the very bottom of my heart?"

For four years, shut out from the sight of green fields and blue skies, this holy woman, for no evil she had ever done, but only for speaking and writing what she believed to be the truth of God, was kept in prison. But her spirit found its way by prayer and holy thought to God. And God was ever near to her. I will repeat some lines in which she tried to tell the very thoughts by which she was cheered:—

"Strong are the walls around me
That hold me all the day,
But they who thus have bound me
Cannot keep God away.
My very dungeon walls are dear,
Because the God I love is near.

“ They know who thus oppress me
 ’Tis hard to be alone,
But know not One can bless me,
 Who comes through bars and stone.
He makes my dungeon darkness bright,
And fills my bosom with delight.”

It is now more than twenty years since the comfort of God’s presence in a deep pit and a terrible darkness was felt in other circumstances than those of a prison. In the first month of 1862 the heavy iron beam of an engine which was working above the mouth of a coal-pit at Hartley broke in two, and one half of it went crashing down the shaft. The shaft was six hundred feet in depth and lined with wood. As the heavy mass went down it tore the wood from the sides, and loosened the earth and the stone until the shaft was completely blocked up. More than two hundred colliers were in the pit, some of them fathers, some of them lads as young as some of you.

Did God fail His children in that terrible deep? Very soon they knew that every one of them had to die. They were six hundred feet down in the solid earth. The one way of escape was blocked up. Around them was darkness. Before them the deeper darkness of death.

Actually they did die. But when at last the place in which they died was reached, it was found that they had spoken to each other of God and of a better world. One had written on the lid of a box to his wife, “Farewell, Sarah; the Lord bless you!” Another

had taken his son into his arms and lay down with him that they might die together. The dead lay in rows together, as if they had gone quietly to sleep ; brothers beside brothers, sons beside fathers. They had said one to another, no doubt, in their first agony, "Surely the darkness will cover us." But it turned out, through the mercy of God, and the vision of His presence which He gave them, that the very darkness became light about them, until they learned that neither height nor depth was able to separate them from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III.

IN A HOSPITAL.

I will only mention one other place where God is present. Were you ever taken to see a children's hospital? Did you enter the large room filled with tiny beds, and see the sick and hurt children lying on the beds in sore trouble and crying out with pain? I was reading a ballad yesterday by our great poet, Tennyson, about a hospital of that kind, in which it is shown how there also, to help the little sufferers, the loving God is present.

One day the kind old doctor of the hospital brought in a clever young doctor to see a little boy who had been crushed by the wheels in a mill. And this young doctor said, "He will never get better." The nurse said, "Oh, but we shall pray to the good Lord Jesus

for him." At that the clever young doctor said, half to her and half to himself, "Praying to the good Lord Jesus cannot set a broken bone, and the good Lord Jesus has had His day." He meant that there was no good Lord Jesus in hospitals to help the sick and the wounded, or to hear prayer on their behalf. The only helper in hospitals, according to him, was the clever doctor. Now that was an evil thought to think and an evil word to say, and it was none the less evil that it was thought and said by a clever doctor. That vexed the nurse, who loved her little patients, and prayed for them to Christ.

There was at that time in the hospital a dear little girl called Emmie, and she was very ill indeed. But it was her good fortune to have this nurse, who prayed to Jesus for the little ones who were ill. By-and-by the time came when the old doctor must try whether little Emmie could be healed. There was only one chance. He must cut away something that was keeping her from being well. But as he looked at her on the little bed, so white, so thin, so wasted, he said to the nurse, thinking the child to be asleep, "I must try to do it, but I really do not think she will live through it."

Poor Emmie was not sleeping; and when nurse and the doctor left she told Annie, who was lying in the next bed, what the old doctor had said, and asked her what she should do. Annie said, "If I were you, dear Emmie,

“ I should cry to the dear Lord Jesus
To help me ; for, Emmie, you see,
It's all in the picture there :
‘ Little children should come unto me.’ ”

But Emmie said, “ How is Jesus to know ? there are so many beds in this ward.”

“ That was a puzzle for Annie ;
Again she considered, and said,
‘ Emmie, you put out your arms,
And you leave them outside on the bed.
The Lord has so much to see to ;
But, Emmie, you tell Him it plain,
It's the little girl with her arms
Lying out on the counterpane.’ ”

So Emmie did that. She cried to Jesus to help her, and she kept her arms out on the counterpane. And the good nurse prayed and watched—watched so long and so many nights that she was nearly ill herself with watching. But at last the morning came when the old doctor was to apply his knife to the child. The nurse had been dreaming that morning, she said—

“ My sleep was broken besides
With dreams of the dreadful knife,
And fears for our delicate Emmie,
Who scarce could escape with her life.”

“ Then in the grey of the morning,
It seemed she stood by me and smiled ;
And the doctor came in at his hour,
And we went to see to the child.

“ He had brought his ghastly tools ;
He believed her asleep again ;
Her dear, long, lean little arms
Lying out on the counterpane.

“ Say that Christ’s day is done !
Ah, why should we care what they say ?
The Lord of the children had heard her,
And Emmie had passed away.”

Now that is the lesson I wish to leave with you to-day. In the sorest trouble, in the deepest darkness, in the worst of evil days, God will be near to His children and will hear their cry.



A CHILDREN'S CHAPTER.

A CHILDREN'S CHAPTER.



SOME chapters in the Bible belong to the children. The seventeenth of First Kings is one of them. It is the story of the ravens that fed the prophet Elijah, and of the barrel of meal that wasted not in the home of the widow at Zarephath.

I still remember how often I turned to this chapter when I was a child. I liked to read about the ravens and the barrel of meal. I thought at the time that I understood the chapter; but I know now that it was only little bits of it I understood, and even these in a way that was poor.

There are two things in the chapter in respect of which my thoughts were those of a very little child. I did not understand all that was meant by the words: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." I did not know, as I came to do when I was older, that they meant death to man and beast. I did not think of the sheep and the cattle, nor of the mothers and babies, that must die for want of water and of the food which water helps to grow. I did not think of the fields that could grow no corn,

and of the people that could have no bread. I did not see that it was all the same to say "no dew nor rain," as if the prophet had said "no harvest, no flowers, no fruit, no grass for the cattle, no corn, no bread for man, and no work for workpeople: nothing but hot suns, baking hard and dry the earth, and smiting old and young with famine and death." In my childishness I only thought of wicked Ahab and Jezebel. I said to myself: "They deserved to have a bad time, and to be without rain or dew, for being so cruel to the prophet."

The other thing in which my thoughts were wrong was the brook Cherith. It was very stupid on my part, no doubt, but if I had been a painter at that time, and had been set to make a picture of Elijah at the brook, I should have painted a beautiful little river running through the land, just like an English river, and the prophet sitting on the bank. But how could there be a beautiful river running through the land when there was neither dew nor rain? Rivers are the children of the dew and the rain. No rain, no brook. The brook Cherith then could not have been like an English brook. It was a deep gully among the hills, a kind of pit far down in the earth, which the winter torrents had dug when rain was plentiful; a deep pit, hidden out of view of man by brushwood, and cool to sit in, where the sun's rays could not pierce, and full of water which the last rain had left. This was the place to which God sent the prophet. He would be

safe hidden there. He would have store of water there. It would be a shelter for him till the evil time went past.

Although I was wrong in some bits of my thought as a child, I was not wrong in all. Now that I am a man I think just as when I was a child, that there was a real and right connection between the wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel, and God's withholding of dew and rain. Wickedness like theirs never goes unpunished. Then and now the ways of evil-doers must be hard. Although God does not always take the way of keeping back the rain, in other ways,—by war, by pestilence, by losses in money, by failures in trade, or by taking away life that is dear,—He shows His displeasure against sin.

But this is not a chapter to show the judgment of God, but one to tell of His mercies. We learn from some words spoken by our Lord at Nazareth, that all that happened at the brook Cherith happened because He was thinking of the poor widow at Zarephath. This chapter, therefore, is like a window opening into the very heart of God.

It helps us to see the wonders of His love to poor people. Perhaps there was not in all the world at that time a poorer woman than the widow at Zarephath. Alone with her little boy, with only a handful of meal in the barrel, with no knowledge of where the next handful was to come from, she must have been amongst the poorest of the poor. And she was a heathen :

without knowledge of the great things which God had done for the Jews. Yet to this poor widow, to this woman ignorant of God's great deeds, God was about to send the man who was the greatest in Israel—perhaps in the whole world. He was about to send Elijah. It is God's way. When the lost world was to be redeemed, He sent, not some great king, nor some angel, but the greatest in heaven or earth, His own Son, the brightness of His glory. And that Son took the form of a servant, that He might do His Father's will in this work of saving the world.

And that is not the whole of this wonder. Not only does God send great ones to poor people, as He sent His own Son to lost people, but He makes it a law that the great ones who are to do His work must first have lessons to prepare them for their work. That was the law even for Jesus. He came into the world to teach men and women to be obedient children to God. But in order to do this He had Himself first to learn obedience. He knew power, He knew command, He knew everything that God's Son in heaven might know; but obedience as a man He had to learn. And He learned it by the things He suffered. His Father set Him to endure hardship, and hunger, and opposition, and mockery, and unjust judgment, and at last death. And He said at every step: "Not my will, but Thine, O Father." And so it was with Elijah, who was one of His forerunners.

Although the widow at Zarephath was the poor body

I have described, the great Elijah had first to learn the lesson she was to be taught, and not till then go and deliver it. The lesson she was to be taught was that God cared for her, and that behind the care for her was love. And Elijah was set by the brook Cherith to learn that very lesson. And morning and evening, as the ravens brought him bread and flesh to eat, he took that lesson into his heart. Those black-winged bringers of the food seemed to say to him every day—"O Elijah, we are God's servants doing His will ; and we will bring this bread and flesh to thee to show thee that thou art cared for by God—that the wicked Ahab and Jezebel shall not prevail against thee." And I am sure, if we could have been beside Elijah on those mornings and evenings, we should have seen the tears running down his cheeks, when his heart burned within him at the thought of the tender and continuous care of God.

In reading a chapter like this, boys and girls, and some old people as well, are apt to think that it is not only of an old world they are reading, but of a world that has quite vanished from the earth, and was quite different from that in which we are living now. People say, "There are no miracles now ; no ravens bring bread and flesh ; and there are no barrels of meal that waste not." But that is all a mistake. There are miracles now as many as then, and as wonderful, although they are not wrought for us in the very same way. The miracles of the old times, told of in the

Bible, were wrought to help us to open our eyes on the miracles which are being wrought every day in all our homes. The barrel of meal that wasted not—is there a child among all the children who shall hear or read these words who has not seen that miracle? Is not this very barrel to be found in the home of every child who has had daily bread to eat? Day by day the child comes down to the breakfast-room, and from the beginning till now, want has never been known—or has never been known for long. And although God does not send our bread and flesh by ravens, is it less wonderful, is it less a miracle, if He sends it from countries thousands of miles away, in ships; or from places in our own country by trains which are drawn by fire? Wherever there is a home in which bread and flesh have not failed, and where water has been sure, where the children have been fed and nourished from infancy up, there, in that home, in one form or other, the very miracles this chapter tells of have been wrought by God.

But now, coming back to brook Cherith and the prophet,—the time drew near when he was to leave that shelter, and the school where he had been set to learn his lesson, and go to Zarephath, and teach it to the poor widow and her son. The brook dried up. And God said to His servant, “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon; I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

I have often thought of the meeting between those

two at the outside of the poor home :—the prophet with his hairy mantle, with his tangled hair, with his flashing eyes, faint and wearied with his journey, but with a heart that had hope in God ; and the poor famine-stricken widow, with blanched face, with eyes sunk in her head, with lips black by reason of want, and with a heart in which hope was all but dead.

The very first thing the prophet did was to put her faith to the test. Was this the widow to whom God had sent him ? If it was, there would be something in her heart to which he might appeal.

The test he applied was a very hard one. Between death and this poor widow and her child there was just a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil—in our cool country it would be called butter—in a dish. No more ! This one meal, and then famine—then death. And Elijah said to her : “ Make for me first.” What a trial of faith was that ! Give up the one handful of meal to a stranger ! Do not think this was selfishness. Elijah was speaking for God, and to try if she had trust in God. Some way or other she was aware that he was speaking for God. Some way or other she had been prepared for this hour. And God gave her grace for the hour when it came. She prepared the food for the prophet first. She said to her son, “ Forbear—it is God who bids me do it.” And from that hour prosperity came into her house : the barrel of meal wasted not, the cruse of oil failed not. All the time the famine hung over Israel and the world, there was plenty in

that house. Poor though she was, she opened her heart to the glad news, to the new lesson, that God was caring for her. She showed her faith by receiving the servant of God and giving up her last morsel to him. And God blessed her trustful faith.

And now another wonder in God's ways with His children comes to view in this chapter. When God gives one lesson, it is that those who receive it may go on to learn a second. God's children are always at school. Heaven is the highest school of all. And so this poor widow found. She learned that God is the Lord of the meal and the oil; and that corn-fields and cattle, and milk and honey are only from His love. But it is not enough to learn that we live by God's bread; we must learn other things of God by which we live as well. And by-and-by the widow was set to learn her second lesson. It was the lesson that life itself is from God. He laid His hand upon her boy's life. The boy died. There was meal in the barrel, but her boy was dead. Perhaps she had never before thought that her boy was as much a gift from God as the meal. Or, that the life in her boy was a gift as much as the bread by which it was nourished. She learned that now. The Lord took her boy; and the light went out of her home and out of her heart.

She sent up a great cry of anguish. She cried to the prophet, "O man of God, has this come to me for my sins?" The only thought she could think was that God was angry. She did not yet see that whom the

Lord loveth He chasteneth. But she was to learn this second and higher lesson. God made her wise above the wisdom of heathen people in that age. He taught her to trust Him for her daily bread; He taught her that lesson by first bringing her store of bread low and then filling it with plenty. And in the same way He taught her to trust Him for her life and her son's life. He took life away from her boy. But to show her His power and His love, He gave it back to him again.

One other very helpful lesson comes in through this recovery of the widow's son. But I will only mention it. It is a lesson for those who have been called to weep as this mother was for their dead. What happened to her was a light shining in a dark place, to foreshow the life and immortality which only Jesus could bring to light. Mothers in old Testament times had not the same comfort which mothers now may have. They did not know that the dead should rise again. But foregleams of that comfort were given now and again by God. And this giving back of the widow's son was one of these. What happened to that mother will happen to all bereaved mothers who put their trust in God. To them also, but in a more glorious fashion and in a better world, a world where death can never return, God will give back the dear children they have lost.

"PROVIDENCE IS MY HERITAGE."

"PROVIDENCE IS MY HERITAGE."



IN the last sermon I preached to you, I took you to a chapter in the Bible in which some of the wonderful ways of God with His children are laid bare to us. It is a chapter to show us how God provides homes for His children, and food to nourish them, and also the lessons they are both to learn and teach. And, if you remember, I said that those wonderful things did not take place only in the old times of the prophet Elijah, but in all times, and in our own times as well.

Since then I have been thinking this over, and I see that if I could now give you a chapter or two from the histories of people who have lived in times nearer our own, or in our own, and who are people like ourselves, and not great people like Elijah, I might help you to see how God is working these wonders of His love always, and that the lives of His children are set in the very midst of them.

In a moorland country where I once lived there is a lonesome bit of highway, on which a solitary cottage stood. This cottage, in the days I knew it, was the

abode of a farm-labourer who had nothing to support his wife and children except his weekly wages. They were very poor ; and they were about to become poorer still. It was winter. The ground was hard with frost ; and at one of his tasks one day the father fell and broke his leg. You may be sure the heart of the mother was filled with anxious thought ; but she believed in God and was a daily reader of His word. So in the evening of the day when the sorrow fell on their home, and after the village doctor had set the broken limb and the children were all in bed, she took the Bible and read a portion of it for her husband and herself. And it happened to be the Psalm where it is said, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." Then she settled herself in an armchair by the bedside, for she was to sit up with her husband that night ; and by-and-by she was glad to see that he fell asleep. But her own thoughts were busy with what she had read. And the words kept sounding in her heart as if they had been spoken to her by God, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." As she sat there in that silence some one knocked at the door. It turned out to be a shepherd leading his sheep to a market in a neighbouring town. He said to her, "One of my best sheep has hurt its foot on a stone, and cannot travel farther ; if you will give me a pound I shall leave it with you." But the woman said, "I have not a pound, nor anything like a pound, in the house." And then she told the

story of that day's mishap, and pointed to her husband in bed. The man answered, "In that case, my good woman, you shall have the sheep without the money, and my man will stay behind for half-an-hour and kill it and dress it for you." And all that kindness was done to her. On the very night when her need was so great food came to her and her house from God, which lasted and was an abundant supply till her husband was able to go out to work again.

About two hundred and eighty years ago a clerk was wanted in the parish church of Ugborough, a little village in Devonshire ; and one of the candidates was a young lad about sixteen years of age, who came from a neighbouring village. But he did not get the place because of his youth. He was very much cast down. He was the son of poor but worthy parents, and one of a large family of brothers and sisters. He said to his mother, with a heavy heart, "I must not be a burden any longer upon father and you ; I shall set out and find work of some kind or other elsewhere and support myself."

So he bade farewell to his father and his brothers and sisters, and with a little bundle in his hand he left his home. His mother went with him two or three miles of the way. When at length she was obliged to turn back, she knelt down with him at the roadside and asked God to bless him and go with him and keep him from every evil way. Then she took out some money and gave it to him for the journey. Then the two kissed each other and, weeping, parted.

By-and-by he arrived at the city of Exeter. He went to the cathedral ; he wandered about the streets ; he called at the shops ; but of all to whom he applied that day no one had work for him. At last he found himself standing at the window of a book-shop looking at the rows of books on the shelves within. At that moment, happening to lift his eyes he caught a glimpse of the cathedral ; and the thought suddenly shot into his mind that there was a connection between these books and the cathedral. If he, poor though he was, could become learned in books, he might be worthy of a place some day in a cathedral. It was a mere thought, and it soon passed away from his mind. He left Exeter and travelled on and on till at last he found himself in Oxford. He knew nobody there. But having passed through Exeter, and knowing that Exeter College was the one to which Devonshire students went, he knocked at the gates of that college and asked if they wanted a lad like him for any work he could do. They did want such a lad as he. And in a short time he was employed to scour pans, to clean knives, to brush shoes, and in other ways help in the kitchen.

John was a faithful servant, and soon became a favourite with everybody about the college. And as he had a good many hours of leisure he set himself to learn Latin and Greek. And by-and-by the dons, going past, saw this kitchen-boy poring over loose leaves of grammars, and would ask him jokingly if he was reading Homer or the Latin poets. But after a

while one and then another gave up joking at the lad and went near to him, and saw that by himself alone he had come very near to the reading both of Homer and the Latin poets. And then the dons took him away from the kitchen and made room for him in the classes of their college, and he became one of their foremost scholars, and one in whom they all felt pride. And by-and-by John was made a fellow, and then a professor of Divinity, and for twenty-seven years he laboured in that college as professor and writer of books where he had served as kitchen-boy. And at the end of that time he was made Bishop of Worcester, and therein proved the truth of the thought which shot through his mind at the window of the book-shop in Exeter, that there was a way through books to a place in a cathedral.

Bishop Prideaux was never ashamed of his early trials. He kept the leathern clothes, in which he set out from his father's house, to his old age. He loved to revisit the village in which he was born. He greatly loved his parents. In his kindness he would plan surprise visits. He would bring his doctor's scarlet gown and put it on to please them. He never tired of showing them reverence. Often he would say to them, "If I had got the clerk's place in Ugborough I should never have been Bishop in Worcester." He loved to think that his mother's prayer had been answered in the happiest events of his life. And he did not think differently when the happy years came to an end and

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years of disgrace and war came in their stead. Those who triumphed in that war drove him from Worcester, but he still felt, and said, that all his life had been planned out for him by God.



THE EMPEROR AND THE WIDOW.

THE EMPEROR AND THE WIDOW.



WHEN I was speaking to you lately about Providence, I had to tell you of help coming to the helpless, and food to the hungry; and, no doubt, it is a great blessing to any one whom God visits in such a way.

But there are two things we should remember alongside of this blessing. Sometimes God shows His fatherly care of His children by keeping back from them things they would like to have. And He does this because, when such things are given to them, they sometimes forget the Giver, and become hard, and disobedient, and proud.

It is not good to be without food or help. But also it is a danger for us to have too great abundance either of food or help. And that is the meaning of the prayer in the Book of Proverbs: "Give me neither poverty nor riches . . . lest I be full and deny Thee . . . or lest I be poor and steal."

I hope none of you, to whom I speak this evening, may ever be so poor as to be tempted to steal. But in this country, where God is pouring out abundance every

day on every side of us, there is greater danger that you may some time or other be tempted in the other way. When riches increase people are very apt to think it is by their own power and cleverness they increased. Then they become vain and proud, and set themselves to do great things by their riches alone. And that is a great evil. It is still worse when the riches draw away the heart from God and there is nothing left but love for the riches themselves. This is part of the evil we pray to be kept back from when we say: "Lead us not into temptation."

Let us try therefore to turn our hearts to those two dangers for a little, and to the need there is for us all to pray that God would keep us back from the evil of forgetting Him through the very gifts He sends to us.

In a delightful book of old-world ballads* I have found two stories which will help us both to understand these dangers and how to escape from them. I cannot give them in poetry as they are given in that book. But I shall tell them as well as I can in homely prose.

About thirteen hundred years ago there was living in the city of Constantine a great Emperor called Justinian. When he cast his eyes over the city in which the palace was, he saw that there was no church, or no worthy church, for God. And he said to himself, "I will supply this want. I will build a church with which God shall be pleased. And I alone

* "The Silver Store." By the Rev. Mr. Baring Gould.

shall do it. And the glory of doing it shall be altogether mine." And he further said, "God will be pleased. And when I die, and my soul arrives at the gate of heaven, the angels of God will come out and blow their trumpets and say: 'Enter, Justinian, who built the great church to God.'"

So he called together his architects, and masons, and workers in wood, and iron, and brass, and gold, and said to them, "Build me a church for God, such as there shall be none equal to it for magnificence. See that no one is suffered to contribute nail, or plank, or stone to it except myself. And when it is finished, inscribe above the great door of it these words: *Built to God by the Great Emperor Justinian.*"

And the architects, and builders, and workers in wood, and brass, and gold, began to work. And soon the harbour was crowded with ships bringing marble to build the walls; and the streets with waggons, drawn by oxen, carrying the marble to the site. And by-and-by the walls began to rise. And after a time they were completed. Marble outside gloriously carved; inside, gold, and silver, and precious stones. Then a day to open it was set. And on the day before, above the great door, the words were carved as the Emperor had commanded: *Built to God by the Great Emperor Justinian.*

At last, on this day that was set, a chariot of gold was brought to the door of the palace, and the nobles, and chief captains, and priests, and all the great

workers who had worked at the church, and all the army came dressed in glorious apparel, and waited behind the chariot. Then the doors of the palace were thrown wide open, and amid the blowing of trumpets Justinian came out, shining in gold and purple and precious stones, and took his seat on the chariot of gold. Such a day had never been known in the city of Constantine. The streets resounded with music and with the shoutings of the people, as the great Emperor drove, at the head of his nobles and armies, to open the church he had built to God.

As he drew near to the church his heart swelled with pride. He alone had done the work for God.

He raised his eyes to see the inscription. But what he saw there was not what he expected to see. His face flushed with anger. His brow knit, his eyes flashed fire. Justinian's name was nowhere to be seen. What he read was this:—*This house to God, Euphrasia, widow, gave.*

Who had dared to mock Justinian in this way? He called for the carver of the inscription; but he, trembling, could only say it was the Emperor's name which he had carved. He called for architects, chief priests, chief captains. They replied in fear, "O mighty Emperor, this only we know, that last night our eyes beheld thy name, and not another, graven on that wall."

Then, when every one was silent, the chief priest found courage to say, "My lord Emperor, it may hap-

that this is not of man, but of God. Who knows whether this strange name has not been written by the finger that wrote the Ten Commandments on stone, and the strange words on the walls of Belshazzar's palace?"

When this was said the Emperor began to tremble, and to ask, "Who, then, is Euphrasia the widow?" At first everybody thought she must be some rich lady, richer than the Emperor, who, unknown to him, had given more than he to the Church. And a search began. And at last the searchers came to a poor cottage, near the docks where the marble for the church arrived. And in that cottage they found Euphrasia the widow, whose name was carved where the Emperor's had been. So they brought her straightway to Justinian to be examined.

When she came into the Emperor's presence, what he saw was a poor old grey-haired woman, with marks of sickness on her face. At first she had nothing to tell. She had not even heard of the inscription. Had she dared to disobey the commands of the Emperor? Had she given gold or marble, or wood or iron, to the church? No, she had given neither gold nor marble, neither wood nor iron. "Hast thou done anything—anything at all—in connection with the building of this church?" Then the old woman said, "My lord Emperor, if I have done anything contrary to thy commands, it was in ignorance. This is my history since the church began to be built. I was laid down with sickness; my body was racked with pain. Weary

days and nights passed over me. Month after month I lay in pain and sickness. But in my loneliness and distress God remembered me, and He sent a linnet to cheer me. It came every day to my window-sill and sang its song to me. And that song gladdened me, and filled my heart with thankfulness. And when I recovered I said to myself, 'I shall show my thankfulness to God in what way I can.' So, because I could do nothing else, I plucked handfuls of the straw on which I had been lying and scattered them on the sharp stones which cut the feet of the oxen that were dragging the marble from the ships. That was all."

But that was more than the great Emperor had given, who yet seemed to have given all. That was the gift of a loving and thankful heart. Even the proud Justinian was put to shame. "Verily," he said, "she has given the most in giving love, and therefore has her name been written by God above the door of this church."

Justinian sinned just as Nebuchadnezzar had done. God had given him riches and power, and he did not give the glory of them to God. And instead of praying, "Lead me not into temptation," he filled his heart with the pride of the thought, that he would do a great thing for which even the angels of God should give him praise.

THE LUCK-FLOWER.

THE LUCK-FLOWER.



YOU may be quite sure the old widow Euphrasia, of whom I was speaking last Sunday, said every day of her life, "Lead me not into temptation." Her temptation was to think that God was forgetting her; she was so poor, so sick, so racked with pain. But God kept her from yielding to that temptation. And besides that mercy, He sent her the linnet with its daily song. She never forgot that. She never ceased to be thankful for that. Though the bird was small, and the song only the song of a bird, Euphrasia knew that God's love to her was in both.

If Walter, of whom the next story tells, could have thought as she thought, and prayed as she prayed, and if he could have been contented with God's love in little things as she was, his life would have had a happier ending than it had.

He was young and strong. He lived among mountains in a beautiful land. One day he set forth, staff in hand, to climb the mountains. It was a lovely summer day. The trees cast their shadows on the sides

of the mountains ; birds sang in their branches. Little rills of water trickled over rocky beds on their way to the valley ; flowers grew on every bank ; and the heart of the young man glowed within him as he stepped from one beautiful object to another.

Still ascending the mountain, he came to a spot where roses bloomed, and mosses were wet with the tiny stream below. He gave a cry of joy. Beneath the roses and the mosses his eye caught sight of a little purple flower—a flower he had long wished to get—the Luck-flower—

“ The Wishing-Wort, Forget-me-not.”

Often had he heard of this flower, which blooms but once in seven years, and only for a single day. He gathered it and set it on his breast, and then renewed his walk with steps more active than ever. He had climbed a long way from where he began ; but to the top the way was longer still. High above him soared the peak of the mountain. Rougher and steeper grew the path. At last it ended at a sheer breast of rock. Walter sighed. Was he to fail so near the top ? He saw a strong tuft rooted in a cleft of the rock. He seized it ; he sprang up the steep. As his body swung to and fro, the Luck-flower on his breast touched the rock, and in a moment there was a hollow moan, a splitting open of the stone wall, and the entrance to a mighty cave. But still more wonderful, when he looked into the cavern he found it full of all precious things—gold and precious stones, stones red, and

green, and yellow, and purple. And there were diamonds sparkling clear as water from the spring. Never before had such riches been seen by him; never had he even dreamed of such. And it was no dream, but reality. A step farther, a step into the cavern, and he could touch the gems. Ah, if now, at that moment, he had lifted up his heart to God and said, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil," how different this adventure would have been! But Walter in a moment forgot God, forgot the beautiful mountain he was climbing, forgot the Luck-flower which had so filled him with joy, forgot trees and flowers and songs of birds, and all the happy, innocent, joyous life that God had given him, and fastened his eyes greedily on the riches at his feet and on every side. In a moment he might be rich. And in a moment he stepped down into the wondrous cavern and began to fill his pockets, his breast, and at last his cap, with the rubies and diamonds and gold.

If you had seen him now! He was not the same bright and happy youth as when he set out in the morning. The face of youth was gone. The face of care was in its place. He had become in one hour a miser, a hoarder, with no thought, among all his thoughts, but this—"It is the one good for me to gather these riches."

And if you had been near to see him you might also at that moment have heard a tiny voice sounding from the floor of the cavern, and saying, "Forget-me-not,

forget-me-not !” O poor, foolish Walter ! If this greed for gold and precious stones had only left him room to think, he would have known that it was the voice of the Luck-flower which had dropped out of his breast. It was the Luck-flower which had opened the mountain for him, and by which he had been admitted to all this wealth. But it was nothing to him now ; he had forgotten it. He despised everything except the gold and the precious stones.

Again and yet again the flower called to him, “Forget-me-not—forget-me-not !” but Walter gave no heed. He heard the cry, and would not pause to think what it was. His one work now was to get home with his treasures. He turned ; he made for the entrance. Behind him still sounded, but more and more faintly, the cry, “Forget-me-not.” He was deaf. Another step, and he would be outside. But that other step was never to be taken. He had left his guardian angel behind him, on the floor of the cavern. It had opened the door for him ; it could have kept it open till he was out. But it was no longer on his breast—not even kept in mind. Walter came up to the entrance. There was a rumbling noise, then a crash of rocks, and the youth was crushed between the closing sides of the mountain.

When I first read this story I recalled the great chapter in Job which tells how man by his skill has dug into mines and hidden caverns for gold and precious stones. And then it asks : Has any man found the

path into the hidden places where the riches of heaven are to be found? I remembered how it tells that heavenly riches are better than gold or silver, or precious stones. And, also, that the way to find these better riches is an easier and happier way than that which leads down into the caverns of the earth. It is a way that opens in the heart. It is a way that is to be found in the heart of many a child. It is the way of the fear of the Lord.

Yes, I said, the fear of the Lord in the heart and the Luck-flower on Walter's breast resemble each other. Many a child setting out in life to climb the hill of life, finds this Luck-flower—this fear of the Lord—in the lessons learned at the fireside. It is found in the hearts of godly mothers and fathers, and from theirs it passes into the hearts of the children. Happy is the child who, finding it, keeps fast hold of it to the end! It is the great lesson of the fear and love of God. It will open gates into the heavenly places where the riches of the soul are stored up. But ah! the case too often is, that many who have found it in their youth let it go, as Walter let go his "Luck-flower." The greed of gold and of earthly splendour is like Walter's greed for the treasures of the cave. Everything else is let go. The true Luck-flower,—the lessons, the joys and the innocent thoughts of childhood—are cast away, thrown into the dust, forgotten. And the life whose breath was the fear of God is at last crushed within them, and they become dead souls in the sight of God.

But I must let the poet, whose ballad I am making use of, tell the lesson in his own words :—

“ Friend ! some little flower may lie
In hollows of thy memory,
That pleads to thee with earnest cry,
‘ Forget-me-not, forget-me-not ! ’
Some little flower, not long to last,
Would mysteries ope long bolted fast,
If firmly to thy bosom claspt ;
Some flower whose touch would open hurl
The heavenly gates of lucid pearl ;
Some little flower that ne’er again,
Though sought in penitence and pain,
Once lost, thou ever canst regain—
Forget it not ! forget it not ! ”



HENRY AND TRITEMIUS: TWO STORIES.

HENRY AND TRITEMIUS: TWO STORIES.

I.



AM going to tell you two more stories to-day about Providence. I am going to tell you first a little bit of a boy's history, in which the providence of God showed itself just as really, though in a different way, as in the case of the feeding of the prophet by a raven, or the feeding of the multitude by Jesus. In this case it was neither the sending of bread to the hungry, nor the ordering of a life, but the working of the spirit of God in the secret places of the spirit of a child.

In a district of the country well known to me there once lived a hill farmer who had a boy about ten years old and a baby girl. The mother had died some months before, when the baby was born. She had been a very tender mother to Henry, who during all his years had been her only child. And long before boys in that district were sent to school she had taught him to read and had stored his memory with verses of the Bible, which he repeated to her in the long afternoons of the Lord's Day.

It was a little farm, where the work was hard and servants few, and where both servants and master had to be out all day in the fields. And so it happened, young though he was, that Henry had often to take his dead mother's place at the cradle, and rock the baby to sleep. As the solitary hours went past, the verses hid in his heart by his mother would sometimes come up, and bring the lost image of her face back to him, and fill his eyes with tears.

The farm-house was built on the brow of a hill that overlooked the neighbouring village. By the side of its garden ran a little stream. Half-way to the road was a mill-dam. Not far from that stood the mill with its plashing wheel. Then, about half-a-mile farther, was the village. Looking out of the end window Henry could see all these objects; on summer evenings could even see the people moving across the village green, and on winter evenings the lights in the shops. And many a time, as the silence of the farm-house gathered about him, the wish came into his heart that he had been born in a village, where there were other boys to play with and many strange sights to see.

This wish was most troublesome at the yearly fair of the village. At that time the place was filled with strangers, and the green was covered with travelling caravans and shows. Village boys who came up to the farm for milk would sometimes tell him about the shows. The very pictures outside of them were worth going miles to see. There were pictures of lions,

tigers, zebras, elephants, crocodiles, and serpents. There were pictures of men in strange dresses killing these terrible beasts with spears. One boy had been inside. He had seen a real lion ; he had touched the trunk of an elephant ; he had seen a serpent coiled about a showman's neck ; he had seen ships made of glass, and waterfalls of glass, and birds of glass ; and kings and queens of wax with real crowns and dresses, such as royal people wear. These reports coming to the lonely boy filled his heart with a great desire to see the shows, and his father had promised that on the very next occasion Henry should be taken to see them.

But the next occasion happened to be hay harvest time. The hay in a neighbouring farm was late, and Henry's father and his man had been asked to help in bringing it in, and they were not to be home till late. Henry saw the great yellow caravans passing at the foot of the hill. He heard the drums beating and the bugles blowing as they entered the village. He could see the crowds gathering as the shows were set in order for exhibition, and it fell on his heart like lead that he should not this time either be taken to see the wonderful sights.

And now began that working of spirit in Henry, and the co-working of the Spirit of God in his, which shows that the Providence of God cares for what passes in our secret thoughts.

Baby was asleep ; she was in her afternoon sleep. There would be time to run to the village and back

again before she awoke. Only, his father had laid the strictest command upon him not to leave the child. But Henry said, "If my father were here he would allow me to go. He promised that I should be taken to see the shows the very first time they came ; and he will be sorry when he comes back if I should miss seeing them." Henry, you see, was by these thoughts leading himself fast into temptation. But the help he needed began to work within him. The words of the Bible which his mother had taught him began to make their voice heard in his heart. He remembered especially the words of the Fifth Commandment as they are quoted by Paul—"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord." He knew that what had come upon him was a temptation to disobedience. But then he also knew that if his father were at home he would be glad for him to go. Might he not take one short peep at them ? He could be in the village and back in less than an hour. As he played with the thought, he came out to the door—went a little way by the side of the stream—went down as far as the mill-dam, and heard the plashing of the waters as the wheel went round. But there he stopped. Up like a living voice in his heart rose the words, "Thou, God, seest me," and somehow or other the voice seemed to him the voice of his mother. At the same moment there came a burst of music and the shouting of children from the village, but Henry put his fingers in his ears, turned, ran up the road like an

arrow from a bow, and when he got inside and saw the child he had been about to leave alone, burst into sobs and asked forgiveness of God.

He did not see the shows that year. But God sent a show to him in his sleep that very night. He dreamt that his mother opened the door of the room in which he was sleeping, and came to his bedside. She was more beautiful and lovely than ever he had seen her. She looked at him a long while without speaking, then she said, "*My Henry,*" as if she were a little sorry. Then she stooped down and kissed him, and last of all she smiled and left the room.

Do not think that such things as these are beneath the care of God. He cares for the very sparrows—how much more for boys and girls! Henry would have yielded, not partly, but altogether to the temptation if he had not been under the care of One who loved him and was not far from him in that hour of his need.

II.

My second story is to show that when God's children do what is right He makes known to them that He is pleased.

In the Middle Ages—that means a good many hundred years ago—there was a great abbey, in which religious men lived, in a place called Herbipolis; and in the church of that abbey the chief man, the abbot, worshipped God morning and evening every day of the

year. He was a very holy man, and strove always to do the thing that was right.

Although he was the chief in that great house he was not rich. It was a rule in the house that none who lived in it should have any money, and when they gave alms to the poor it was not money, but food they gave. But in one thing they seemed to be rich. On the altar in the church where the daily service was held stood two candlesticks of solid silver.

One day the abbot was kneeling at the foot of the altar in prayer when he heard a cry so sad, so piercing, it went to his heart at once; and, turning round, he he saw an old grey-haired woman on the floor of the church with her withered hands held up, and speaking, and this was what she said: "O Father Tritemius, for the dear love of Christ, help me to buy back my son from slavery." Father Tritemius well knew what that sorrow was. The times were very evil, and fierce pirates and robbers from other lands came and stole children and grown-up people, and sold them for slaves; and only by a great sum of money could they be bought back. But Tritemius had to say, "Money I have none; what I have I will give. I will give my pity and my prayers." But the woman answered, "Mock me not. Even while we speak together my boy may be dying." Then answered the good man, "No one goes unfed from our door. Of money we keep but one penny in our store. Thou hast our prayers. What can we give thee more?" The mother

answered, "Give me the silver candlesticks ; God can spare these if sent on His errands of mercy. Or He can give you golden ones instead." The priest trembled. The candlesticks were sacred to God's service. But here was a cry in God's name for help, and the candlesticks would be the very help that was asked. He felt that God was speaking to him in the woman's cry, and, trembling as he did so, he gave her the silver candlesticks.

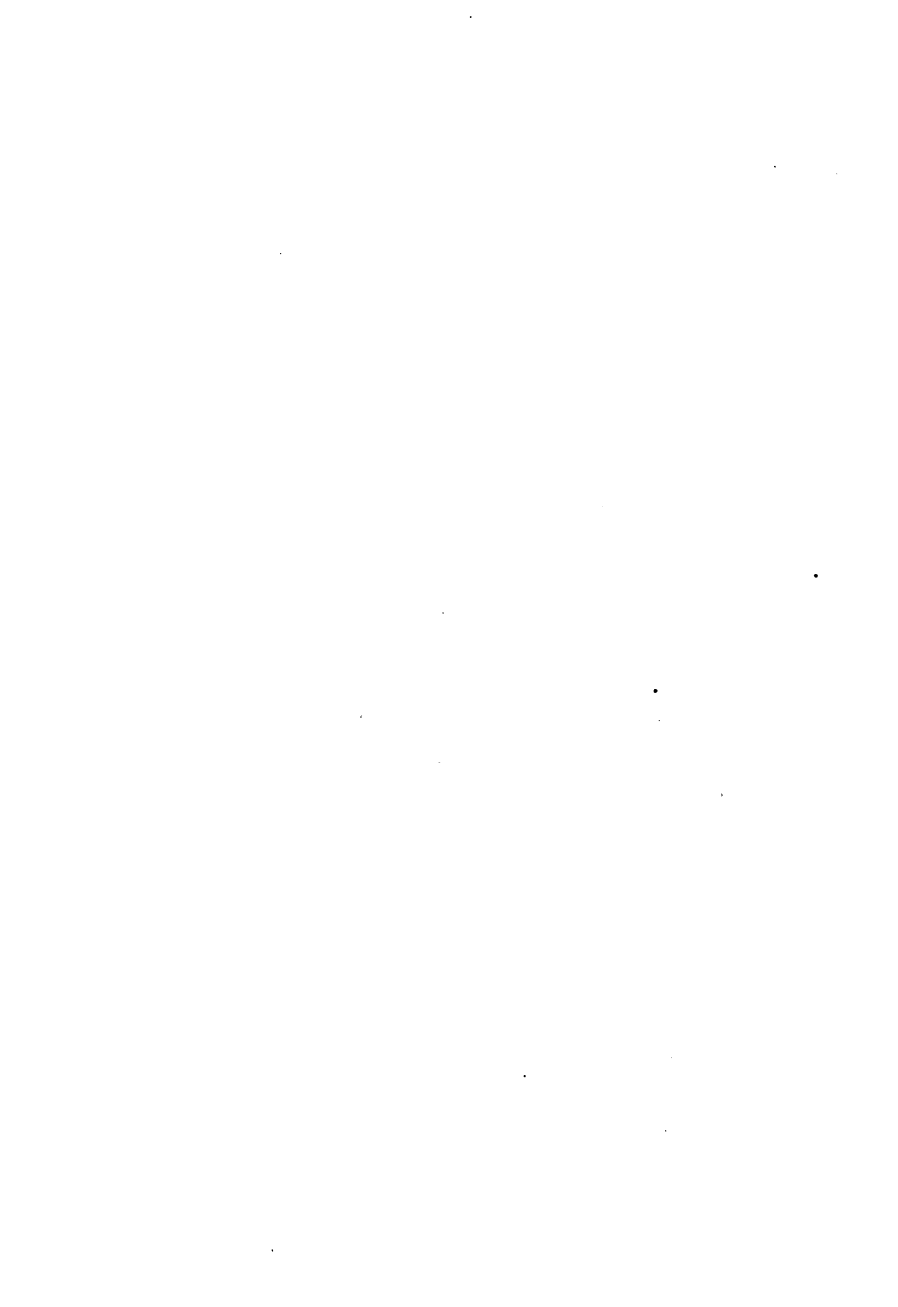
But all that day he walked about in fear. Had he done wrong ? Had he put any dishonour on God by giving away the gifts on the altar ? His thoughts troubled him. At last the hour for the evening service struck, and Tritemius, still trembling, entered to worship God ; and, lo, the chapel was lit up, and where the silver candlesticks stood were gold ones in their stead !

In ways like these, and ways more wonderful still, God's providence is working to do us good. The sun shines, the rain falls, the lily blooms, the bird sings to tell us of His care and goodness. He touches one heart into pity, that a helper may go forth to help the helpless ; He touches another with holy anger, that evil may be struck at with holy words. Men and women become His eyes to see misery, and His ears to hear its cry. They become His hands and His feet, and go forth along a thousand different ways to help the sufferers and them who have no help in man. Mothers and sisters become the angels who look into His face

continually, and, receiving His commands, take tender children under their care. And mothers and sisters, and sun and stars, and winds and seas, and clouds and mountains, and rain and fruitful seasons are all His servants, and do His will and work His wonders, and drop down His blessings into our lives, and doing so fill the earth with the glory of His presence.



TRUTH IS BEST.



TRUTH IS BEST.



“HE city was pure gold like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.” This is part of the description of the city in which God and His people are to dwell. Its walls are jasper. Its gates are pearl. Itself and its streets are gold. And the foundations on which its wall is built are precious stones. This is the most wonderful fact of all. Where great rough stones are set under common walls, under this wall of the City of God are laid blocks and squares of sapphires, emeralds, beryls, amethysts, and jasper. As the old hymn says :—

“Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square.”

Now, all this description of the city with its walls of jasper and its foundations of precious stones, is a picture with a meaning in it, like the meaning in a parable. It is a picture of the rich and holy life of the citizens who dwell in the city of God. It is a life so precious in the sight of God and so rich in good things,

that only this wonderful vision of a golden city with jasper walls can set forth its beauty and worth. And the foundation of precious stones is a vision of the good and holy things which are the beginnings of the life, the first thoughts about God and Christ, on which all the after thoughts are built up.

I am going to take you to one of the good and precious first things—which these stones represent—which God lays down, or causes to be laid down, in the hearts of the young citizens, and tell you a story to show its worth in after life.

Some time after the beginning of the present century, there was living in a busy country town in the north a pious couple who had an only son. For this son they daily prayed to God. And what they asked in their prayers was that God would enable them to lay in his young heart, among the first lessons he should learn, the love of all things honest and good. "It is our duty," the father said, "to ground our boy well in truth and uprightness." "Yes," the mother answered; "it is like laying down one of the precious stones under the wall of the New Jerusalem." The boy took kindly to their lessons. He opened his heart to their pious teaching, and learned to love the things they praised, and to desire to have them in his heart. So the foundations of an upright life were laid in the boy's heart, and among these very especially a regard for uprightness and truth.

In the course of years the boy's school-days were

ended, and also his apprenticeship to a business life in the country town ; and as there was no prospect for him there, he came up to England, to one of the great seaports, and by-and-by he got a good position in a merchant's office. He was greatly pleased with his new office, and wrote to his father and mother that Providence had been very kind to him, and had opened up to him an excellent place.

But he was not long in this excellent place before he was put to the test in a very painful way, with respect to the lessons he had received about truth. It was part of the business of that office to have ships coming and going. And it was the rule, when a ship came into the port, that its captain sent word to the office that he had arrived and was now waiting instructions where to discharge the cargo. And it was the duty of the manager in the office to send back instructions to the captain where and when this was to be done. A few months after this little lad from the north came to the office, a ship laden with coal came in, and the usual message from the captain came, but somehow or other no word was sent back to him. The captain waited a week, and still no word came back. Now that was very hard on the captain. Until his ship got free of its cargo it had to lie idle in the dock, and all who belonged to the ship were kept idle too. So, at the end of a week, or it may be some days more than a week, the captain sent word to the office that his ship had been kept so long waiting for instructions

where to discharge its cargo, that it had missed a good offer of a new cargo, and the office would have to pay him for the loss. This payment is called "demurrage."

When the manager of the office got this message from the captain, he was very angry. He thought he had sent instructions where to discharge the cargo, or he made himself believe he had sent them. At any rate, he sent for the little lad from the north, and said to him, "Didn't I send you down to Captain Smith with instructions to discharge his coals?" The little lad said, "No, sir; I do not remember being sent down." "Oh, but I did," answered the manager, "you have forgotten." And there, for a time, so far as the office was concerned, the matter was allowed to rest.

But the captain did not intend to let it rest there. He applied for his demurrage. And when that was refused, and his word, that he had received no instructions, was disbelieved, he took the master of the office to law. And by-and-by his complaint came before the judges in the court of law.

The day before the trial, the manager came to the little lad from the north, and said to him, "Mind, I sent you to the dock with those instructions to discharge the coal." "But, I assure you, I cannot remember your doing so," said the lad. "Oh yes, but I did; you have forgotten."

It was a great trouble to the lad. He had never been sent to the dock. He could not say he had been

sent, and he foresaw that he would have to say before the judges what would certainly offend the manager, and lead to the loss of his excellent place.

On the morning of the trial he went to the court. The manager came up to him and said, "Now our case depends on you. Remember, I sent you to the dock with the instructions to discharge the coal." The poor lad tried once more to assure the manager that he was mistaken, but he would not listen. "It is all right," he said hastily. "I sent you on such a day, and you have got to bear witness that I did—and see you say it clearly!"

In a little while he was called into the witness-box, and almost the first question put to him was, whether he remembered the day when Captain Smith's ship came in. And then this: "You remember during that day being sent by the manager of the office to the dock with a letter for the captain?" "No, sir." "Don't you remember taking instructions to Captain Smith to discharge his coals?" "No, sir." "Were you not sent by the manager of your office to the coal ship on that day?" "I was not, sir." "Nor next day?" "No." "Nor any other day?" "No."

The gentleman who put the questions was a barrister. He had been engaged by the manager to win the case for the office. But when he heard the little lad's replies he saw that the manager was in the wrong, and he turned to the judge and said, "My lord, I give up this case. My instructions were that this witness would

prove that a message to discharge had been sent to Captain Smith, and it is plain no such proof is to be got from him."

So the case ended in the captain's favour, and against the office in which the little lad had found so excellent a place.

He went to his lodgings with a sorrowful heart, and wrote to his father and mother that he was sure to be dismissed. Then he packed his trunk to be ready to go home next day, and in the morning, expecting nothing but his dismissal, he went early to the office. The first to come in after him was the master. He stopped for a moment at the little lad's desk, and said, "We lost our case yesterday." "Yes, sir," answered the lad, "and I am very sorry I had to say what I did."

By-and-by the manager came in, and after a little time he was sent for to the master's room. It was a long while before he came out; then the little lad was sent for. "I am going to be dismissed," he thought to himself. But he was not dismissed. The master said to him, naming him, "I was sorry yesterday, but not with you. You did right to speak the truth, and, to mark my approval of what you did, I am going to put you in charge of all the workings and sales of our Glenfardle mine." Then he sent for the manager, and told him what he had said, and added, "and the young man will make his reports direct to me."

Six months after, the manager left the office, and young though he was, the little lad was appointed to his place, and before as many years had passed he was admitted as junior partner in the firm, and he is now at the head of the entire business—the managing partner.

In his case truth was the best. But I want to say that if things had turned out other than they did, and he had been dismissed, it would still have been the best for him to speak the truth.

A lie is a thing hateful to God ; but truth in the lips and a love of truth in the heart—that is like a bit of the jasper wall, great and high, that is founded on precious stones, through whose gates of pearl we enter into the city of God.



THE GOLDEN RULE.

FOUR PORTIONS.

I. A GOLDEN STREET.

II. DOING TO OTHERS WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE OTHERS
DO TO YOU.

III. LOVING OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES.

IV. THE BLESSING OF OBEYING THE RULE.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

FOUR PORTIONS.

I.

A GOLDEN STREET.



It is just possible that among the children who are listening to me this evening, there may be one—a very little one—who does not yet know that there is a verse in the Bible which is called the Golden Rule.

It is that verse near the end of the Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord says, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” That is a verse so wise, so good, that all who have tried to do what it bids, say of it, “It is as good as gold; it is precious like gold: because of its wisdom and goodness, it is a golden verse.”

A few Sundays back I was reading to you the description which the Apostle John gives of the city in which God and His children dwell. You will remember that that city is described as a city of pure gold. If I had read a little farther on that day I

should have come to a description of the street of that city. Of the street, just as of the city, it is said that it is pure gold. "The street of the city is pure gold, like unto transparent glass."

Now one thing answers to another in the different places of the Bible. I like to think that this street that is pure gold answers to the rule which Jesus has laid down for us in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the rule for the citizens of that city of God of which Jesus tells us in the Sermon. That city is just the city which John saw coming down out of heaven, and of which he says, "It was pure gold like unto transparent glass."

Reading the rule in the Sermon is like listening to the words as they come from the lips of the King. They come to us as His commandment. It is the rule of the city in which he is King.

But when the rule enters into our heart, and we receive grace to obey it, then it becomes something else. Then it becomes the way in which we walk. It is a portion of the living way along which we are called to go. And as a path in our daily walk, in our life's way, it is the street that is pure gold like unto transparent glass.

Let us try then to understand what this Golden Rule is. And that is all the same as if I had said, Let us try to understand what it is to walk on the golden street.

It is simply doing to others as we would have others do to us. Always we want others to be good and true

and kind to us. Our Lord says, "Act always in that way to others. Be kind and good and true to them." When we have to deal with other people we are not to think of our own interests and feelings only, but of theirs as well. What we should wish them to do to us, if we were in their place and they in ours, that very thing we are to do to them.

The Rule, as I have said, is given in the Sermon, in which the Lord sets forth the laws of His kingdom. It is really one of the laws of His kingdom, and of these, it is one of the greatest. Wise men who have looked into it and tried it say, that if it were obeyed by everybody, nearly all the bad things in the world would pass away. It would be a world of upright men. Wrong-doing would be unknown. There would be neither robber nor murderer. There would be neither slave nor slave-market. Gamblers, dog-fighters, drunkards, and betting men would disappear. Servants would be faithful. Masters would be just. There would be neither backbiters nor evil-speakers. Homes would be happy. Crimes would be unknown. Jails would be empty. And wars between nations would come to an end.

At first sight, therefore, it might seem as if it were not for humble places and little people at all, but only for grown-up people and for kings and nations. But the beautiful thing about the laws of God's kingdom is that they are for little people and big people alike. And nothing is more beautiful in the law, which has

been named the Golden Rule, than this, that the humblest people can be made to understand it and obey it, and that it is as good for boys and girls as for the citizens of the New Jerusalem.

And this I shall try to show you the next time we meet.

II.

DOING TO OTHERS WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE OTHERS
DO TO YOU.

I was spending a few weeks in the country once, and in the house where I lodged the mother was unwell. She was unwell in that way that she could do nothing without help. She could not rise, she could not walk, she could not go out into the fresh air without help. And it was beautiful to see how she was waited on and helped by one of her daughters every hour of the day. That daughter was like an angel in the house; so cheerfully did she give the help which her poor mother required. I did not need anybody to tell me that the Golden Rule was written on that daughter's heart.

Two young lads left by one of the sea-going steamers a few years back. They went to a country on the other side of the globe. From the one came home to his parents hardly ever a letter. Mail after mail came in, but the letters the old people looked for from their boy seldom came. He forgot them. Or he forgot to care for them. Or he did not take pains to think of them

The other lad never missed a mail. Week by week arrived a letter, an interesting letter from him in which he told them all his state. That letter was a weekly joy in the family into which it came. You could see a smile going over the face of the mother as she took it up and said : " It is from Jack." Ay, Jack had got the Golden Rule by heart. He had said to himself, " If I were at home, and had a mother's or father's love for my boy, I should wish him to write to me." And just that was the difference between the two young lads I have introduced to you. The one obeyed, the other disregarded, the Golden Rule.

There was a very simple girl living in a Scottish village once. I knew her well, for she was a member of my Bible-class. She was a beautiful girl, and she was very affectionate ; but she was an orphan, and had been brought up without a mother's care.

After a time she was married. And at first and for a good long while all went well in her house. And her husband and she were happy. But by-and-by there was a change. Some babies were sent to her from God and her work was heavy, and she came not to care to have her house tidy and bright for Tom when he came in. I should have told you that they were poor people, and that Tom was a weaver by trade. It was a great change for Tom. In his mother's house everything was always bright and clean and ready. But now when he came up from the shop, wearied with his work, ready for his food, he would find things all in

disorder. And sometimes, I am sorry to say, he had to cook his own breakfast and dinner. He was very vexed; but he said nothing. However, a good time was in store for him. His wife knew well enough that things were not as nice for Tom as they ought to be. And one night she had a dream. She dreamed that she was in Tom's place and Tom in hers. And in her dream, she came up out of the weaving shop, tired and cold and hungry, and found the fire nearly out, the kettle not boiling, the breakfast not cooked. And she felt in her dream just as Tom must have been feeling every day in his waking hours. It was enough. She said to herself: "This dream has come from God;" and she set herself that night to be a true help to Tom, and have a home for him where it would be a pleasure to him to come. And the happy days came back again—and days happier than they had known. Through her dream, the young wife had found out the power of the Golden Rule.

Mr. Whittier, in one of his ballads, tells a most touching story, in which one can see how the Golden Rule was both broken and fulfilled.

A hard and bitter time had fallen on the hearts of men. The fear of things evil was greater than the joy in things good. An unseen world was thought to be round about, and under and over the world that is seen, and people believed that it was filled with evil shapes and influences, that were ever ready to break out and put a blight on the lives and homes of earth. The

horrible belief came into human hearts that Satan had more power than God, and that he made bargains with people and gave them the gift of witchcraft so that they could work evil on the earth. If fever came into a village, or sickness into a cowhouse, people believed it was witchcraft that did it. And a terrible rage seized hold of nearly everybody then living to find out and punish the witches.

The sorrowful thing was that there were no witches. The belief in witchcraft was all a wild delusion. But, all the same, under the power of it, many innocent and harmless women were cruelly handled and judged and put to death.

In a certain village in New England, during that evil time, lived a poor widow with her one child. Goody Martin she was called. And on her, on an evil day, the suspicion of the people fell. Evil speakers, who had no regard for the Golden Rule, spoke foul, bad words against her. She was a witch, they said, and one evil speaker egged on another. And at last, the poor old widow, who had never wronged a neighbour nor neighbour's cattle in her life, was dragged before the judge and condemned, and put to death as a witch.

And then came the lonesomeness as of death to her child Mabel. Everybody avoided her. Every door was closed against her. When she came into the church the worshippers sat as far from her as they could. If people met her on a country road, they turned away their heads or jeered at her, as the witch's child.

Near by was the farm of Ezek Harden. He never believed the story of the mother's witchcraft. He had never taken part against her, and he had pity for the lonely child. Often had he dandled her when an infant on his knee. When the feast of the harvest-home came round he invited Mabel among his guests. But it was misery to her. The other young people kept out of her way, or threw some bitter word at her. With an aching heart Mabel stole quietly away, and returned to her solitary home.

But in the heart of Ezek Harden was kindling the light of the Golden Rule. He saw the rude behaviour, the cruel looks. The loneliness, the misery, the wicked injustice of his guests' treatment of the young girl went to his heart. He put himself in imagination into her place. He knew how he should feel, both what anger at the injustice and what yearning for human love. And that very afternoon he followed Mabel, and said to her—

“ Dear Mabel, this no more shall be,
Who scoffs at you, must scoff at me.

“ You know rough Ezek Harden well,
And if he seems no suitor gay,
And if his hair is touched with gray,

“ The maiden grown shall never find
His heart less warm, than when she smiled
Upon his knees, a little child.”

Her tears of grief were tears of joy,
As folded in his strong embrace,
She looked in Ezek Harden's face.

"O truest friend of all," she said,
"God bless you for your kindly thought,
And make me worthy of my lot."

It was the Golden Rule, as much as Love, that led this kind farmer to befriend and marry the outcast girl. When he left his cruel guests that afternoon, and followed her to her lonely cottage to offer her his home, he was walking on the street that is pure gold.

III.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOURS AS OURSELVES.

In certain books which I have read I have seen this question put, "Whether the Golden Rule was ever heard of before it was spoken by Christ?" And the writers of these books go on to answer, "Yes; it was heard of and spoken hundreds of years before Christ, and in other countries besides Judea." Writers who answer in this way think they are making Christ seem less wise and great. But for my part I should be much surprised if something like the Golden Rule had never been spoken before. In much that our Lord said when He was on the earth, He was only putting into perfect words what prophets and holy men, in words less perfect, had tried to say before. And who but He helped those holy men to speak such words? It was by His Spirit, working in their hearts, whether they lived in Judea or not, that they were able to speak as they did.

The gold in the Golden Rule is not its newness

but its goodness. It comes to us from God. In reality it is not new. As the Lord Himself said, "It is the law and the prophets." If you search the Old Testament you will find it there, but in other words. And what is better still, if you examine the good deeds of the good people mentioned in the Old Testament, you will find that they were the deeds of people who had the Golden Rule written on their hearts.

The brothers of Joseph were none of them very kind. But there was one, even of them, whose heart was touched by the Golden Rule. When the others proposed to kill the boy, Reuben said, "Shed no blood. Cast him into this pit, and leave him there." He was thinking of the old father at home, and of the grief he would be in if the boy were killed; and perhaps he was thinking of the boy himself. "If I were the boy I should not like to have my young life cut off; if I were the old father, with my heart filled with love for my boy, I should not like to have the grief of hearing that he was dead." He got the unkind brothers to cast the child into the pit, intending when they were gone to deliver him and send him home.

What was stirring in the heart of old Naomi, when she stopped on the road from Moab to Bethlehem and said to her daughters-in-law, "Return, my daughters, to your native land"? This thought was working in her heart: "If I were young, as those two are young, and had a father's house to go back to, and friends,

and the chance of happy days in the years to come, I should wish to be urged to return." It was the Golden Rule.

And what moved Ruth, a few days after, when Naomi and she were settled in Bethlehem, and they found that one of them must work for bread? It was the Golden Rule. She thought in her heart, "Here is the mother of my dead husband and mine; and she is among friends and neighbours who knew her in happier days; and she is old and weary. If I were old and weary, and had come back poor to my nation, where once I was not poor, and had a daughter strong and young like Ruth, I should wish my daughter to work for me." And the brave and loving Ruth acted on that rule, and went out to the fields of Boaz day by day to glean among the reapers till the eventide.

And what but the Golden Rule moved Jonathan, the son of Saul, to be the friend of David? He saw David in his father's presence harping and singing to make the sick king well. He also saw the black anger gathering on the face of his father, as his father thought, "This harper, this shepherd-lad, is one day to be king." And perhaps he saw the angry king seize his spear and hurl it at David to strike him dead. The heart of the generous Jonathan was filled with concern. "If I were a stranger at a sick king's court, as this shepherd is," he said to himself—"if I were hated by the king as he is hated, I should want somebody to be my friend." He became the friend of the

stranger. His soul clave to the soul of David. He took him away from the anger of the angry king. He wrapped him round about with his love, and took him out to the open country and helped him to escape.

And it was the same Golden Rule that stirred the heart of David, when his friend Jonathan and King Saul were killed on the battle-field. He sang a song in their praise that is remembered to the present day. And he taught the people of the kingdom to sing it. That is the song in which he says of Saul and Jonathan, that they were pleasant in their lives, and in their death were not divided. As he prepared the song, I am sure the thought that burned like a fire in his heart was this, that if a battle had gone against him, and he had fallen as his friend and his friend's father had fallen, and he could still have known what was going on, his wish would be that Jonathan, if still alive, should sing for him, as he was singing for Jonathan.

And it is the Golden Rule, but I am sorry to say the Golden Rule broken, which I find in a parable spoken to David himself in after years. You remember the parable of the one ewe lamb which a poor man had, and of which, by a rich man, he had been robbed. And you remember how David cried out when he heard that parable, "Put the rich man to death;" and how the prophet Nathan who spoke it said, "Thou art thyself the man." David had done a very evil thing, and then, to hide the evil, a thing more evil still. He

stole the beautiful wife of a poor soldier, and that the soldier might never know, he had him set in the forefront of a battle and killed. In both of these evil deeds he was breaking the Golden Rule. And God sent his servant Nathan to tell him the evil he had done, and David was made to see that he had trampled the rule beneath his feet.

Do not be surprised then if you find the Golden Rule in the Old Testament. Do not be surprised if something very like it should be found in the lives of people who never heard of the Bible. Christ is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And even in heathen countries He may have sent gleams of His rule into the hearts of some who have lived there.

I am reading just now Dr. Turner's book on Samoa, and I find, among the stories he tells in that book, one which shows that the Golden Rule was acted on, in one instance at least, before missionaries or Bibles were known in the island. The people had the horrible custom of eating human flesh. They were cannibals. Malietoa was a king and a hero, but he was also a cannibal. His son Polu abhorred the custom, and had helped to bring it to an end in one of the islands. Then he returned to his father's home. The first thing he saw was a poor boy waiting to be killed for the king's dinner. The boy was wailing, and the cries went to the young prince's heart. "Do not cry," he said, "and I will try to save you." So he had himself

tied up in green cocoanut-leaves—just as if he had been the boy killed and cooked and ready to be set on the king's table. The king looked ; he saw two bright eyes looking up at him. He knew his son. The thought passed through him like an arrow : "What if my son had been really put to death for food !" And he was so much struck, besides, with his son's goodness in taking the other boy's place, that he made it a law in his kingdom that human flesh was never more to be eaten. Who put that thought into his heart ? —Who but Christ, who is the Light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world ?

IV.

THE BLESSING OF OBEYING THE RULE.

About the Golden Rule I should like, before leaving it, to say two simple things more.

The first is this : that nobody can follow this rule without, in one way or another, coming into a blessing. In the keeping of this law there is a great reward.

Perhaps there is not one of you who has not either read or heard the old story of the woodman and the child. All the same, I am going to tell it over again to-day.

On a Christmas Day, many years ago, when there was more forest than corn-land on the earth, a woodman was hasting to his home. The trees were bare of leaves, but snow was falling, and only one who knew

the forest could have found his way in the gloom. This was a poor man with rough hands and coarse home-spun clothing. Many a sad hour he had spent at his lonely toil in the wood. But on this particular day there is neither sadness nor look of poverty in his face. The joyful thought is in his heart: It is a half-holiday, and I am going to spend it eating a Christmas dinner with my wife and my little ones.

As he made his way through the blinding snow, he heard the moaning of some one in distress. He stopped. He followed the sound. And at the foot of a tree, shivering with cold and hunger, and all white with flakes of snow, he found a strayed child. The sight went to his heart. The innocent grief, the tears, the wet clothes, the pinched face, made the tears come into his own eyes. He thought of his own children sitting beside the warm log fire, and of the joy awaiting them that afternoon. His thoughts went back to the time when he was a child himself, and to the times without number when, like this child, he had lost his way in this very wood. Then he imagined himself, or one of his children, in the place of the child before him. What would his wish be if he, or a child of his, were in this child's place? It was the work of a moment to think all this. In less time than I have taken to tell it, he had lifted the child in his arms, and was hasting on as before. And by-and-by he came to the little hut which was his home. The mother and children were peering out, through the half-open door, for the first

sight of him, and waiting to give him a Christmas welcome home. But the child was a surprise. Who was this in father's arms, so pinched, so cold, so thinly clad? The story of finding him was told at once. And at once also both mother and children welcomed the little stranger to their home. Very soon the wet clothes had given place to dry, and the warmest corner at the fireside was given up to him.

How happy they all were in that hut that afternoon ! Never had Christmas Day been more joyfully spent ! The humble cottage seemed to grow larger. The fire burned more brightly than ever they had known. And when they gathered round the table and stood up, after the manner of the wood folk, to sing a Christmas carol by way of grace, it seemed as if every child had learned to sing more sweetly than before. And the poor pinched, thin-looking stranger sang louder and happier than them all, and with a voice that seemed to belong to heaven, it was so sweet.

Then they sat down to their Christmas dinner. Everything tasted sweet. The black bread seemed not so black as its wont. And in the mouth it tasted like wheaten bread. The children noticed also, that the pinched look left the face of the little stranger ; the very clothes seemed to change and brighten, and when he spoke it was like listening to an angel.

Not on all the earth that day was there a happier Christmas party. And when at last it was over, and the children had to go to bed, it some way did not

surprise them that the strange child prayed for all in the house who had been so kind to him. Then he kissed them all round.

In the morning he was gone. But the black bread was changed to white bread. The brass money in the mother's pocket was changed to gold. Then the pious hearts in that humble cottage knew that it was the Christ Child Himself who had been their guest: but they did not know, they could not at once understand, that these things and the happy memory of His visit were the blessing with which He paid them for obeying the Golden Rule.

I will leave you to think over this story in your own minds and to find out what it means. And I will bring my sermon to an end by making my only other remark about the Golden Rule.

The time will come, my dear children, when the lessons you are receiving just now, in your homes and here, and the new years that will soon be added to you, will lead you to ask: "What can we do to help on the Kingdom of Christ upon the earth?"

You will come to look round about you in the world. You will learn that there is work to be done for Christ. "What is the work which I should do?" each of you will ask. Some will become Sunday-school teachers, some will go into the choir, some will be visitors of the sick, and others will set themselves to do whatever Christian work comes in their way. But the earnest among you will go farther and ask, "What can we do more than all that?"

I will tell you what you can do more than all that ; and what you can be beginning to do even now. You can get the Golden Rule by heart and into the innermost and warmest place of the heart ; and you can set yourselves to observe that rule every day you live and in all places wherever you may be.

Although you may not see the effects of your doing this, God will see it. You will not only help, in doing this, to bring the Kingdom of God nearer among men ; but you yourselves will be—there, where you live—there, where you follow this rule—a portion of that Kingdom already come.



A STORY ABOUT A MOTHER.

A STORY ABOUT A MOTHER.



O-DAY I am going to tell you a story about a mother. It is an old story now. But it never feels old when telling it. It has been told for hundreds and hundreds of years, and it will be read and read again as long as there are mothers and children in the world.

The sorrow which filled the heart of the mother whose story I am about to tell was the sickness of her child. Her child—her daughter—was grievously vexed by this sickness. And there was no one to heal her. Often, as the mother saw her child in pain, she had wrung her hands in agony. Often, finding no help in man, she had lifted up a cry to heaven.

And two wonderful things happened to her.

The first was, that this cry was heard in heaven. Although the poor woman who cried was a heathen, who did not know aright the God who lives in heaven ; who perhaps had never heard of His mighty works in Egypt and at the Red Sea ; who did not know the names of the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, or Daniel ; who had never seen the Bible, and had never been to

Jerusalem and the temple there to worship, yet her cry was heard in heaven. That is one of the great wonders of the world. Although we cannot see the Maker and Ruler of the world, the cry of an afflicted mother, the cry of any one in affliction, uttered anywhere, uttered at any time, goes right up to His ear in heaven.

The other wonderful thing was, that Jesus came to her in answer to this cry. Although He was a hundred miles away at the time, and although He had not meant to go into her country—all the same, when her cry went up to heaven, things on earth began to work together to draw Him to her side.

At the moment when her cry went up, the Lord was teaching in Galilee. The people He was speaking to there thought themselves the children of God; but they did not like His Son's words. And they said to Him, "Thou? Thou art no true teacher. Thou eatest with unwashed hands." But He replied, "It is worse with you: you eat with hearts unwashed." At this they were filled with rage and sought to kill him. But His hour to die was not yet come. So He quietly turned His back on Galilee, and went toward the hill country of Lebanon, and along the sides of the hills, till He came to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, where this poor woman lived. And all this took place—the wrath of the people in Galilee, and the flight of Jesus—that this poor heathen mother might have the cry answered which she had sent up to God in her affliction.

When the woman saw Jesus she seemed to know that He had power to help her, for all at once she addressed her cry to Him, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David. My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

I cannot tell you what that illness was which this poor woman described in those words. I am sure it was an illness very hard to bear, and for the mother as hard to see. But I want you to understand that it was this sore illness in her child that brought the mother herself to Jesus. It was her daughter's sickness and pain that lay heavy on her heart. "Have mercy upon me," she said. She took her child's sorrow on herself. She made it her own.

I said a little while ago that when the mother saw Jesus she seemed to know that He had power to help her. This is the next thing to understand in this story. She really believed that Jesus could heal her daughter. Jesus said afterwards to her, "O woman, great is thy faith!" The thing which He had not found in Galilee, among people who read the Bible and went up to Jerusalem to worship, He found in the heart of this heathen woman. She believed. It was not much she could have heard about Jesus before. Galilee and Jerusalem were far, far away from where she lived. Some faint rumours of Him may have come to her. She knew that He was of the house of David. Perhaps that was all she knew. "O Lord, thou Son of David," she had said. But she believed as soon

as she saw Him that He was able to cure her child. She cried to Him for that: "Lord, have mercy on me! Lord, help me!" She believed that Jesus could really do what she asked Him to do. The faith, that Jesus afterwards said was so great, was just this thought in her heart, and this outgoing of her heart and cleaving of her whole soul to Jesus for the help she had been praying for. As if she had said: "I have been crying for a helper, and I have found Him. And Thou, Lord, art He. O Lord, Thou art able to deliver my child from this sickness." That was her faith.

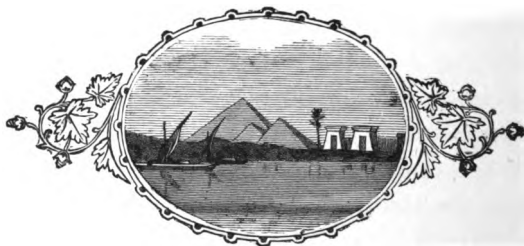
But now a strange thing happened. The Lord who had the power to heal the sick child was come. The mother who cried to Him for His help was waiting for an answer to her prayer. And no answer came. "He answered her not a word." That must have been a sore trial to her. But hard though the Lord's silence was to bear, it was less hard than the reason for the silence which the Lord gave.

The disciples, wearied or touched by the woman's prayers, asked whether she might not be sent away. And to them He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It was spoken to the disciples, but she heard and took the words as an answer to herself. She did not belong to the house of Israel. She was only a poor Syro-Phœnician woman—a heathen. But she threw herself at His feet, and sent up her cry once more: "Lord, help me!" What were words to her just now? The living Healer was in her

presence. And she only cried the more earnestly for the help which only He was able to give.

Do not think that the loving Jesus spoke as He did to the disciples because He did not want to be a Healer to this poor woman's daughter. He meant even then to heal the child. He knew that in order to heal that child He had been sent by His Father all the way from Galilee. His whole soul was filled with wonder and joy at the faith which He saw in this heathen woman. But He would try it a little. He would bring out the strength of it, so that His disciples might see the wonder of it. And therefore, turning to the woman, He said : " It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." She well knew what that meant. She was not one of the children of the house of Israel, to whom He was sent. She was one of a race whom those children were wont to speak of as dogs. But the Lord Himself was not thinking of her as a dog. He was thinking how He had just been rejected by the children in Galilee, and how He was here welcomed and worshipped by one whom those children would have scorned and cast out as a dog. I think He must have shown by the kindly look on His face, and the tender tone in His voice, that He did not think of her in this way. He would not even use the common word for dog when saying what He said, but the kindly pet word, the little dogs, the doggies. And I think also that she must have seen this kindness in the Lord's manner, and felt that His heart was on her side. For she re-

plied at once : "Truth, Lord, I am not one of the children. I am no better than a dog. But even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables." Could any worshipper have uttered a humbler word ? Could any soul in trouble have shown a more tender, cleaving faith in the goodness and gentleness of Christ ? This poor heathen was altogether on Christ's side. She threw herself on His mercy. And she was not put to shame. The Lord said to her,—granting all her prayers,—“ O woman, great is thy faith ! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”



"COMES OF A BAD LOT."

"COMES OF A BAD LOT."



“**F**OR scarcely for a righteous man will one die : yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—These are some of the most wonderful words in the Bible. They tell a tale the most astonishing ever heard by man. It is a tale, the strangeness and wonder of which will not cease so long as the earth endures. And when our lives here are ended and we come to think back in heaven on the events of earth, it will seem more wonderful still.

From these words we learn that the Saviour died for sinners. Not for those that resembled Him,—for godly people, for holy people ; but for people ungodly, unlike Him, evil-doers, enemies.

It would not be done now. No, not if you were to seek through all the world for one to do it.

If it were the case, for example, that one of you had to die. I will suppose you are a merchant. I will suppose, further, that you are a very honest and upright

merchant—let us say, the most honest merchant in the land. You have paid your debts. You have paid your servants honestly. You have never been known to wrong anybody, and people say of you, “He is as honest as steel.” If the case were that you, this honest and upright merchant, had to die, and if some king, or doctor, had the power to say, “You shall not die, but live, if you can get anybody else to die in your stead,”—if such a thing could be, and the king were to send his messengers through all the cities and villages in the land to ask, whether any one was willing to die in place of the honest merchant, there would not be, in all the land, in any city, or village of it, one solitary person who would step forward and say, “To save the life of this honest merchant, I am willing to die.”

If the case were, instead of you being an honest merchant, that you happened to be a kind, very, very kind, good, and loving soul ; if it had been your habit to visit the poor and the sick, to help widows and orphans ; if you were one who had shown kindness to the little children of the streets, and perhaps had been able to build a school, or a hospital, and people when they spoke of you said : “That is an angel of God, a very messenger of His pity and mercy ;” in that case, when the message went through the kingdom, it might be—it might really be—that one, that two or three even, might be found to say : “To save the life of this good and loving helper of the poor I am willing to die !”

For merely upright people not one would die ; for kind people some might even dare die.

But what our Lord did was this : He died—not for upright people, not for kind people only : He died for the unkind, for the unrighteous also. “ While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

That is the wonder which has been a wonder to all who have ever heard of it, and that will never cease to be a wonder in earth or heaven. It shows the greatness of His love. It is a love so great and pitying that it reaches people who do not deserve it.

What was the purpose of this love, that was love so great that He laid down His life for us ? And why in laying down His life did our Lord lay it down for sinners and enemies ? It was to turn enemies into friends ; to help sinners to become holy and good, and to give all who had been living without God a chance of coming to God and becoming good. It is this I wish to make plain to you to-day. I shall try to do so by telling you a story.

Not long ago, a book filled with old Oxford stories was published. Among the stories was one about a little girl and her brother. Mr. Mozley, the writer of the book, happened to want a second and younger servant to help in the kitchen, and one day a girl from a village near by applied for the place. She was not well dressed ; she was not very tidy in what dress she had ; she had a roughness about her as if she had been an uncared-for and gipsy child. But Mr. Mozley said

to her: "Have you brought a character with you?" That meant, have you brought a letter to tell what kind of girl you are? "Or is there anybody who can tell me about you?" She had no one to give her a character; she did not know anybody whom she could ask for one. But perhaps the clergyman of the church she attended might tell him something about her. So Mr. Mozley sent her to him, and by-and-bye she came back with a letter from him.

The letter was in two parts. The first part was written in English, and said that the girl attended his church, and that she lived in the same village with himself, and that if Mr. Mozley engaged her he hoped she would turn out a good servant; but the second part was written in Greek. It was a line from an old Greek poet, and said: "Beware! she comes of a bad lot!"

When Mr. Mozley read the letter, he said to himself: "Notwithstanding this line from the Greek poet, I will give the poor girl a chance." Which he did; and she turned out an excellent servant and remained in his house for years.

Mr. Mozley was himself a clergyman, and happened soon after to be making some repairs and changes in his church. Among other workmen, he had wood-carvers from Ipswich. And a few months after he had engaged the little girl that came of a bad lot, the wood-carvers asked him for a little boy to go messages for them, to attend to the glue-pot, and to hand up to them the different pieces of carving when they were fastening

them about the woodwork of the church. And the girl in the kitchen heard of this. She came to Mr. Mozley and asked in a very humble way whether her brother might have a chance for this place. And Mr. Mozley thought he might. The boy came. He, too, like his sister, at first was rough to look at, more like a gipsy than an English boy. But there was something in his face that pleased Mr. Mozley, and he engaged him. Now the boy, like his sister, turned out well. He was willing, obliging, and handy. He became a favourite with the wood-carvers, and when, after some months, their work was done, they asked Mr. Mozley if the boy might go with them to Ipswich. So the boy that came of a bad lot was taken by the wood-carvers to Ipswich.

Mr. Mozley never lost sight of him. And some two or three years after, being in Ipswich, he went to the wood-carvers' place to inquire about the boy. He found that the boy had become a wood-carver himself by that time and was doing well. A few years later he learned that he had become a foreman in the works, and was liked by the master and men. And from time to time, when he happened to hear of him, the reports were all to his credit.

But years went past—many years—and he had ceased to ask about the lad. One summer he happened to have occasion to travel weekly by the South-Western Railway. Now, he noticed, in passing one of the stations, that a great work in church building was

going forward near by : either the restoration of an old church or the building of a new one. And, being himself a church builder, he resolved to break his journey at that station some day and have a look at the work that was going on. And so he did. And when he came among the workmen and asked who the architect was, he was delighted to find that he was no other than his young friend of other years, the boy who went with the wood-carvers to Ipswich, and who had come of a bad lot. The lad had risen step by step until he had become one of the most trusted church builders of the time.

Now, in a far-off and dim way, but in a very real way, this story will help you to understand what the Lord did for us. He did for us what Mr. Mozley did for the girl and boy who came of a bad lot : He took us by the hand ; He gave us a new chance in life.

We also, like that girl and boy, came of a bad lot. We came of the lot to which Cain and Judas belonged. We belong to the race which put the Saviour to death. Yet Jesus did not reject us. He took pity upon us. He died for us. He died to give us the chance—He died to give us the help we need—of rising from the lot of the wicked and of them who forget God, into the lot of the righteous who do His will.

I will mention one thing more. The history of the boy who became a church builder puts it into my mind.

When the world comes to an end, the history of our

race will be written. But it will not be like the histories we know now. It will not be a history of kings, of armies, or even of nations. It will be the history of the kingdom of Christ, and of the building from age to age of His Church. And in that history it will be set down among the wonderful facts, that the Christian Church was gathered together, and from first to last was built up, by workers and builders who had come, by the mercy and grace of God, from a bad lot.



A STORY OF THE DARK AGES.

TO ILLUSTRATE THE BEATITUDES.

TWO PORTIONS.

I. ISOFENE.

II. ISOFENE'S WORK.

A STORY OF THE DARK AGES.

TO ILLUSTRATE THE BEATITUDES.

TWO PORTIONS.

I.

ISOFEENE.



YOU have come into a room some sunny day and seen a patch of rainbow flickering and burning on the wall. It was the sunlight showing you its jewels. In the room somewhere hangs a crystal pendant.

The sunlight comes in pure and white till it passes through the crystal: then it breaks into the beautiful bit of rainbow you saw. Red and orange, blue and purple, green and violet, and indigo; all the seven colours are there; they all lie unseen in the pure white light; they are the hid treasures of the light.

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord shows us the seven hid treasures of the life of God. Seven good things are displayed to us, as beautiful as the colours of the rainbow. These beautiful things are a humble heart, sorrow for suffering, a spirit of meekness, a

hunger for righteousness, a merciful disposition, an honest heart, and a soul that makes peace among brethren.

This is the sermon in which the Lord speaks of His kingdom, and likens it to a city upon a hill, whose citizens are to be the light of the world. And mentioning those seven good things at the beginning is all the same as if He had said: "These are the beautiful treasures of the light which is to shine from My City. They are the seven different rays of the life of heaven upon earth: the graces, the virtues, the things lovely and of good report, the good things in My children through which My Father's blessings come down." They are the seven colours, which, when joined together, make the white sunlight which is to give light to the world.

In a certain kingdom by the sea there lived, during the dark ages, a beautiful lady, in whose life all the good things named by our Lord were present. She was, in consequence, as good as she was beautiful. She was also an Earl's daughter. She had been, for a few happy years, an Earl's wife. And she was very rich. But she spent her life and her riches in doing good. The poor people of the city where she lived called her The Angel; but her real name was Isofene.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Although she was an Earl's daughter she was not proud. Although everybody who knew her praised her

for her good deeds, she let the praise go past her to God. She looked upon herself as a little child, without strength of its own, and needing at every step it took the favour and help of God. People wondered at the verses she liked best in the Bible, and especially at this, which she often repeated:—"I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." She really felt in that way. In her own esteem she was poor. She measured herself always by the greatness and holiness of God. Measuring herself by such a height, she could not see a difference between herself and the poor people who received her bounty. She did not feel herself to be better, or higher, or holier, or more beautiful, or grander than they. No; she said the rich and the poor meet together at the footstool of the throne of God. For this reason, Paul was her favourite among the Apostles. She used to say of him, although he was a saint living near to heaven, he never ceased to look back on himself as the chief of sinners. He was a man who had many things that might have made him proud. He had a great mind. He had a great place in the Church. He was greater than any king or emperor living in his day. But what he said of the holy and beautiful life he lived was, that it was not his but Christ's. It was Christ living in his heart.

Isofene felt the same way. She was "poor in spirit." She had the humble heart. That was her happiness. In her, self was nothing, Christ was all.

"Blessed are they that mourn."

Isofene had had great sorrows in her life. At the time when she lived, plagues were common in the world. In one year, by one of these plagues she lost her father, her mother, her husband, and her baby. And she was left alone in the great castle that looked down on the city where she spent her days. Some people thought that was the reason why sometimes a look of sadness came over her face, and at other times she seemed as if she were looking into a world far, far away. But those who thought in that way did not understand her. She was one of those of whom the Lord says, "Blessed are they that mourn." She was filled with sorrow. But it was not sorrow for herself. It was not sorrow for the dear ones she had lost. She had carried that sorrow to God, and laid it on His breast. Her sorrow was sorrow for the suffering she saw around her in the world. Her sorrow was of the kind which made Jesus the Man of Sorrows. Many a time, looking down on the city beneath, her eyes filled with tears, as Christ's did when He looked down on Jerusalem. But it was not for herself she wept. It was for the poor people of the city, for their miseries and their sins. There were whole streets in the city where the people did not know that they had a Father in heaven who cared for them. She sorrowed because of that. In the farms around the city there were hundreds of toiling peasants who were slaves, who were often crying out under the lash; she

sorrowed because of that. There were children without homes, without friends; there were homes without joy, without food; there were people sick and dying in every street,—these were the sad things which made her sad, and filled her eyes with tears. But the evil which went most sharply into her heart was this:—the city stood on the edge of a great forest, and the forest was infested with wolves. It was—some people have said—the very forest through which Little Red Riding Hood had to go. A very evil place it was, and a great terror to the people of the city. Hardly a week went past in which mothers did not go forth into the streets wringing their hands because their children had been devoured by the wolves. Sometimes, in winter, packs of the fierce beasts came prowling into the city itself, and seized the children on the very doorstep of their home. This was her greatest sorrow.

“Blessed are the meek.”

Isofene was not one who merely mourned over the evil in the world. She took up the burden of it, and made it her own. She shared the suffering with the sufferers. She reached out hands of helping to put the suffering away. She was one of the workers and burden-bearers in the kingdom of Christ; one of those concerning whom He said, “Blessed are the meek.” Like Moses, who was meek because he took pity on the Children of Israel in the house of bondage, and laboured till he brought them out into liberty, so did Isofene

labour to deliver her poor neighbours from the evil of the wolves. Like the Saviour Himself, who showed His meekness by taking up the burden of the world's sin, and carrying it to the Cross, and dying to put it away—so did Isofene give her life to save the children from the wolves. In this sense she was truly meek. Her meekness showed itself in her loving services in the work of God; in carrying the burdens of poor mothers, of helpless children, and of hearts made sick to death by the horror of the thought that those dearest to them had been devoured by the wolves.

The death-cries of the children, the wailing of the bereaved mothers, the destruction of innocent lives, became a burden to her. She felt in her heart that Christ was calling on her to take it up. So she took up the burden. It was the meek spirit urging her to serve the Lord by helping the poor and the wretched.

She spoke first of all to the citizens. But one and another said, "Such things must be where great forests are." The merchants bought and sold, their sons and daughters danced and sang; but no one gave heed to Isofene. No heart was grieved for the little children devoured by the wolves.

Next she went to the lords, who had pleasure-houses in the forest. She told them of the children. She made her appeal for their help. But they laughed her to scorn. Why should they help to destroy the wolves? Wolves were made for their pleasure, and the forest was the hunting-ground of the lords. They would

neither help nor allow others to help. They turned against her. They said evil things of her. They called her a troubler, a meddler in things which women should let alone.

Once, while the evil lasted, the Emperor of the land came to visit the city. Isofene made her appeal to him. She counted up to him the children who were destroyed every year. She told him of the misery in the homes of the poor, caused by their death. She told him of the anguish of mothers and fathers. This also was in vain. The Emperor and the courtiers who were with him, had other things to do. Some wondered, some mocked. One or two, more pitiful than the rest, came to her in secret, and said their wishes were on her side. But that was all. No one among these high people cared that so great an evil was in the land. She was greatly vexed. She was cast down. But neither her pity for the poor sufferers, nor her resolution to work for their deliverance, was destroyed. The spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus was strong in her. She put her soul more than ever under her burden, and when princes and their sons failed her, she turned the more earnestly to the Lord. "O pitiful Saviour," she cried, "come Thou to the helping of these mothers; hear Thou the cry of the little children, and make it sound in the ears of all who dwell in this land, till the sore evil be taken out of the way."

II.

ISOFENE'S WORK.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

"Blessed are the merciful."

"Blessed are the pure in heart."

There were three things in Isofene that were a great help to her in this good work, and without which, indeed, she could never have done the work. First, she had a great craving for righteousness. Next, she had a very tender heart. And besides these two, she had the Eye of the honest heart. And these things are mentioned by our Lord in His list of the good things in Christian life.

First, she had a great craving for righteousness :—
"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." I think the Lady Isofene, as much as any Christian of whom I ever heard, was one in whom this hunger and thirst was strong. Her soul went out in desires after righteousness. My belief is that she could not possibly be brought into the presence of a wrong thing, but she would feel herself compelled to pray and labour to have it put away. And if the wrong thing were in herself, in her own life—a wrong thought, a wrong feeling, a wrong desire—she would even more earnestly strive to have it taken away. There was never a day in which she did not say to God in her morning prayer : "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if

there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." But in the circumstances in which she was placed, the wrong thing she was most earnest to have destroyed was the power of the cruel wolves. More than they that hunger and thirst for their body's food did this tender-hearted lady hunger and thirst to have this great evil brought to an end. It became the one great wish of her life. Every day she took her longing to God in prayer. As often as men would listen to her, whether they were of high degree or of low degree, she took it to them. Day by day, year after year, by every means within her power, she sought to reach the fulfilment of her desire. And day and night, and year by year, she was mocked, and evil spoken of, and opposed by the enemies of right, and by heartless men and women of the world.

And next, she had a tender heart. Her pity failed not. Her soul, like the soul of the Master she served, was filled with mercy. The more she thought of the innocent children, the more she thought of the grief of their parents, the more did her compassion flow out in her desire to save them. At last, after many years' striving, when she saw that she was getting old, and was no nearer the object on which she had set her heart, she said to herself, "If I cannot have all I wish to have, I shall at least have what I can." She built a house for herself at the entrance of the forest, and gave herself to the task of warning back the children who were about to enter. Many a strayed child, by this means, did this

good lady, like an angel of God as she was, save and carry back to its home. Her merciful heart rejoiced as often as this much could be done. But the great, wide evil still remained. Still ravaged the wolves. Still protected them the ruthless lords of the forest. There were other ways, besides the way at whose entrance Isofene built her house, by which children could enter, and many and many a time the heart of Isofene was filled with anguish as she heard the cries of the innocents pursued by the wolves.

And I think she might have lost heart altogether, if it had not been for the third helpful thing which Isofene had. This third thing was the Eye of the honest heart.

In the picture gallery of the city she lived in is a portrait of this lady, of which I happen to have a tiny copy. The face is wonderful for its beauty. But it is the eyes which lay hold of you. They are the most honest-looking eyes ever seen in a picture. It is like looking into a deep spring of water, clear to the very bottom, when the sun is shining down into it. You seem as if you could see down and down into the very depths of her soul. There are no impure thoughts there. Nor any dishonest thoughts. Nor any mean thoughts, hidden out of view by words or looks which speak the opposite. They are the eyes of a heart that has nothing crooked nor deceitful in it. It is a heart that looks straight up into the face of God, and is glad to have the light of that face searching it through and through.

As often as I look at that portrait, I think of the blessing which God drops down on the honest heart. The blessing is an Eye that sees Himself. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Blessed are those who have no folds, or twists, or dark places in their hearts. Their reward is this—that they see good in everybody, and God in every good. In poor people, in labourers, in slaves, even in outcasts, and people who have gone astray, they see good. That was truly the case with the Lady Isofene. She had the Eye of the honest heart. She once said, "I see Christ looking out at me through the eyes of the poor and the fallen. And I hear His voice speaking to me in the cries of the sick and the wounded, and in the sighing and crying of mothers who have lost their children." She used to say to her friends that God was to be seen in every strayed and homeless child, in every beggar on the streets, and in the very prisoners in the jails.

"Blessed are the Peacemakers."

But Isofene's long labour was about to close. Although people did not bestir themselves to come to her help, her words took hold of them, and they were stirred to the heart. Pious people began to say to each other: "Isofene is right." Even people in high places—the lords and ladies, who once turned a deaf ear to her—came so far as to say, "Isofene is not wrong." Everywhere over the land her word came into the talk of the common people. "It is our children," they said

bitterly, "who are devoured." A great anger was growing up against the lords of the forest. It was known that there had been secret meetings of the peasantry from the villages near by, and of the poorer citizens, at which their anger came out in hot words and threats. Isofene knew that there could be no peace in the district till the lords gave consent to have their wolves destroyed. Often, for their own sakes, she had pled with them to consent; but this, at the end of many years, they still refused to do. And now, hearing the murmur of angry talk that was rising up on all sides of them, and in a blind way seeing that the anger was anger against themselves, they said to each other, "It is the work of Isofene. Let us root out this troubler from our hunting-ground." And they hired evil men to set fire to her house.

It was a moonless night in summer. The day had been hot and sultry; the air in her sleeping room was hot. Isofene threw open the window to cool the air. A crackling sound fell on her ear; then, through the open window came a cloud of smoke. At once she knew that the house was on fire. She had only a few minutes to escape. She roused her servants; she snatched up two children she had that day saved, and fled into the open, and on towards the city. As the little group of terrified women ran they were aware of a change in the air. A strong wind began to blow in their faces. Somewhere not far away the hot night had changed to a night of tempest, and the wind, but not the rain, came

rushing on the forest. It rose to a hurricane ; it blew the flames of the burning house to the brushwood ; the fire spread to the trees. In less than an hour the heavens were red with flames. And that night, the wolves, and the forest, and the pleasure-houses of the lords of the forest, were destroyed ; and the evil, for the removal of which the loving Isofene had so long laboured and prayed, was brought to an end by God.

But Isofene's relations with the wicked lords of the forest were not yet ended. That very night God gave her a chance of showing herself merciful to her old enemies, and of making peace between the angry people and them.

As she drew near the city, carrying the two children, and battling against the wind, she met the crowds of peasant and labouring men hurrying towards the forest. The terrible flames, rising like great waves against the sky, surging hither and thither before the wind, and roaring like the roaring of the sea, brought the anger that lay in the heart of the poor people to a height. They said to each other, "God is giving us our chance. Let us go in and smite the cruel lords of the forest."

Isofene met them when their rage was like the heat of the burning forest. She saw at a glance that they were mad with rage. And she also saw that their mad rage might end in the death of the lords. In a moment it was given to her to see what she ought to do. She placed herself right in the way of the hurrying mob. When they saw the friend of their children, feeble,

worn out, staggering and faint with the weight of the two children in her arms, they were arrested ; they had a moment or two to think ; better thoughts than thoughts of vengeance came into their hearts. Two or three in the crowd cried out at once, " Let us first help the Lady Isofene." Strong men lifted the children out of her arms : other men, linking their hands together, made a chair for the lady herself, and drawing her arms around their necks, turned towards her town house. Moved by the same impulse the rest fell in behind, and followed. And the lords of the forest, at that moment fleeing for their lives, had time to escape. They never knew what Isofene had done. But God knew. And the people whom she had saved from crime knew. And they also knew it was of her, and of such as her, the Lord had said : " Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Isofene never was the same after the fire. Her strength left her. Her hair became suddenly grey, and it seemed as if all at once she had become old.

But her life as a child of God was not old. And it was as rich in good things as ever. In one good thing it showed itself to be very rich. I told you that she had an honest heart. It is God's blessing on the honest heart that when trouble comes the possessor of such a heart sees God in it. In the Babylon furnace, when the three children of the Hebrews were cast into it, a form was seen beside them, like the form of the Son of God. In every trouble into which God's children are

cast, this form can be seen. Sorrow, and sickness, and poverty, and old age are full of God. Even in the valley of the shadow of death it is visible, and the dearest hope of the children of God is, when life is ended, and they awoken from the sleep of death, that they may see and be satisfied with the likeness of God.

Although she was very feeble, Isofene lived, amid the love and reverence of the people, to a great age. And to the end she was a doer of good. The good she loved best to do was the winning of young souls for Christ. And it was noticed that the words in which she was wont to tell them of the way of Christ were the words in the old prophet concerning the highway, "in which the wayfaring, though fools, shall not err, and on which no ravenous beast shall be found."

"Ye are the Light of the world."

It is not every Christian who can be as rich in good things as Isofene. Many can only attain to one or two. In Isofene the seven beautiful graces of the Christian life were fully present. In Isofene, therefore, the light shining from her life was pure and white, like the light from the life of the Master Himself. But in the greatest number of Christian people it is only one or two, or, at most, three of the graces they reach. One is humble. One has the heart that mourns over evil. One is meek. One is merciful. But wonderful is the goodness of Christ to us who only reach to one or two of the good things of His life. He makes the one grace shine in a

light that is very splendid. It shines like one of the beautiful rays of a rainbow.

And perhaps this is the meaning of, and will help us to understand, that wonderful vision which John saw in Patmos. He beheld Christ sitting on the throne of Heaven, and a rainbow round about the throne. On the throne, like splendid light, Christ Himself. Near that centre, the four and twenty elders—people like Iofene—clothed in white—like rays of pure light proceeding from Christ. And then outside—the people who have reached so far in the Christian life as to have one, two, or three graces. These are souls that shine round about His throne like the red, and blue, and gold of the rainbow. They are the rainbow round about the throne.



ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE.

ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE.



“ROOTED and grounded in love.” These are words in a prayer which the Apostle Paul offered for people he loved in the city of Ephesus. Now in praying for people he loved, the apostle always asked the best things. And what he asked for his dear Ephesians was that they might be rooted and grounded in love. What, then, is this best thing which the apostle asked? What is it to be rooted and grounded in love?

This is what I am now to try to make plain to you. But it will be easier to do this if, first of all, I tell you what “rooted and grounded” means.

You have been at the seaside in summer. You have spent many a happy day on the sands. And no doubt you have built houses there, and planted gardens round about them, as we, who are grown up, also in our childhood did. It was perhaps you the poet was looking at who wrote the pleasant verses I am about to repeat :—

“ Once on a time some little hands
Planted a garden on the sands ;
And with a wish to keep it dry
They raised a wall five inches high.

" Within the wall and round the walks
They made a slender fence of stalks.
And then they formed an arbour cool
And dug in front a tiny pool.

" Their beds were oval, round, and square,
Thrown up and trimmed with decent care.
In these they planted laurel twigs,
And prickly holly, little sprigs

" Of ash and poplar, and, for show,
Bright daffodils and heart's-ease low;
With pink-eyed daisies by the score,
And buttercups and many more.

" One rose they found with great delight,
And stuck it in with all their might.
This finished, then they went away
Resolved to come another day."

But when they came back they found that their labour was all in vain. The flowers were withered. The rose and the heart's-ease had died. In all their garden there was neither life nor growth. And this was the reason: not one of all the flowers they had planted had a root. And if every one had had a root, they could not have grown in the salt sand of the shore. A flower that is "rooted and grounded," therefore, is a flower that has a root, and is planted in ground where the root can take hold and grow.

Now this will help you to understand what it is to be "rooted and grounded in love." When somebody loves you, and you lay hold on the love, you are rooted and grounded in it.

One day, on a lonely road that led down to the river Jordan, a mother and two daughters were walking. It

was Naomi with Orpah and Ruth. The red mountains of Moab were behind them. Before them, above the steep sides of the Jordan valley, were the first glimpses of the green hills of Bethlehem. I am almost certain that Naomi had been weeping. At any rate, she had been thinking sad thoughts about the past : and she had had a little battle of thoughts in her heart about the future.

It would be good for her if the two girls came all the way to Bethlehem with her. They would make the years that remained to her there less sad. They would love her. When she was old and helpless, they would work for her ; and neighbours would say, "Naomi is happy in her children." But would it be as good for them ? They would be strangers in a strange land. They would have to live in a home that was poor and bare. And some day, returning wearied from the fields, and catching sight of the Moab mountains, their old home, they might regret the journey they were now taking.

So she stopped and said, "My daughters, you have been very kind to both mine and me. You loved my sons while they lived, and you do not despise their mother. You have comforted me in all my sorrow, and my heart cleaves to you this day. I love you with a mother's love. But to take you farther would not be love. To come with me will be to come into days and years of sorrow. Return to Moab and to the people among whom you have lived. You are young.

God will bless you for your kindness to the dead. He will open up new homes for you ; and it may be that happy years are in store for you both."

The young women burst into tears. Here was a new proof of their mother's love. They said at once, "Mother, we will never leave you."

But Naomi told them all the thoughts of her heart. She told them of the hardships, the poverty, the strangeness, the loneliness of the life that awaited herself in Bethlehem. "Return," she said to them. "Why should your young lives abide in the shadow which must always darken over mine?" And she pressed them to return. Until at last one of the two said to herself, "What Naomi is saying is true. It will be better for me to return." So she kissed the old mother and turned and went back. It was Orpah who went back. But Ruth said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest I will go ; and where thou lodgest I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." And Ruth came to Bethlehem with Naomi.

What was the difference between those two daughters? It was this, that Ruth was rooted and grounded in Naomi's love, and Orpah was not. Naomi had been to Ruth what the Bible and the Church are to you. She was light from God. She was also a guide to God. Ruth had never known days so happy as the days she passed in Naomi's home. She heard

there the old stories about Israel, about the bondage in Egypt, and the ten plagues, and the Passover, and the coming out of Egypt, and the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments, and the water from the rock, and the manna, and Moses, and Miriam, and Joshua. And her heart went out in love to the dear old mother that told the stories. She loved her with all her heart. And a blessing came up into her heart thereby. Ruth's life became holy, and loving, and beautiful from the day she was rooted and grounded in Naomi's love.

Now all this time I have been leading you to a love that is greater than Naomi's. What Naomi was to Ruth a far greater than Naomi is to you. It is not the love of a mother in Israel which you have been brought near to, but the very love of God in the Saviour who died for you. He loved you and gave Himself for you. Is there any love like this? This is the love which has come down from heaven to you, to be a ground of love, on which your heart may take hold, and in which it may root itself for ever.

O blessed life of boy or girl, of man or woman, that is rooted and grounded in the love of Christ! The true glory of life begins when the heart strikes root in that love. It is the true beginning of prayer, of holiness, and of work. To love God who first loved us, that is better than the best thing for any of us that this world contains.

And sometimes in a life nothing is possible but this. You may be laid down by sickness, you may be smitten

by pain, and you may find yourselves unable to sing, or pray, or speak. If such a time should ever come to you, and you are meanwhile rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, it will be a joy to you beyond all joys, that you can say in your heart, "Dear Saviour, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."



DR. ROBERT MOFFAT.

DR. ROBERT MOFFAT,

MISSIONARY.

BORN 1795. DIED 1883.



ON the 9th of August, 1883, died the great missionary to the Bechuanas, Robert Moffat. And eight days later his body was carried to its last resting-place, in Norwood Cemetery, London.

Robert Moffat, like David Livingstone, was a Scotchman. He was born in Ormiston, East Lothian, five years before this century began, and was therefore an old man, eight-and-eighty years of age, when he died.

It is nearly seventy years since he began to be a missionary. In the year 1815 almost everybody in our country was talking about the victory at Waterloo. At that very time young Moffat was speaking to God, and asking Him to accept him as a missionary to the heathen. And next year he was on his way to Africa.

He was one of the great men of our time—a real hero. And he was not only great himself, he was the head of a family of great people. Dr. Livingstone was his son-in-law. The doctor's splendid wife was his

daughter. And a brave young fellow, a namesake of his own, who lost his life in Africa, was his grandson.

It is an honour for anybody only to have spoken to Dr. Moffat. There are men and women in this country who will tell you with pride that he put his hands on their heads and blessed them when they were boys and girls. The good Dean Stanley counted it an honour to have him to Westminster Abbey to lecture on missions there. Good men of all kinds were happy to know him. And I am sure, when our beloved Queen was in Edinburgh unveiling the statue of her dear Prince Albert, and heard that Dr. Moffat was there also at the unveiling of a statue to Dr. Livingstone, it was because it was a joy to her to do honour to goodness that she sent for him and had a cordial talk with him.

It is one of the things I am proud of in my early life, that I heard Dr. Moffat giving a speech about his work in Africa. It is a long, long time ago, during his first visit home. The meeting at which he spoke was held on an afternoon in the Trades Hall of Glasgow. And it was a bright and happy meeting. When it broke up, everybody was saying, "What a fine address he had given." It was indeed a fine address. It was one which could not easily be forgotten. I have repeated parts of it more than twenty times in missionary sermons since. And here, by way of speaking a loving word over the old hero's grave, I am going to tell over again once more to-day two or three of the stories he told that day.

He was one of the finest-looking men I ever saw. He was tall and well made. He had a fine intelligent countenance, very much sunburnt. He had rich black eyes, and fine dark hair, thrown to one side over a high open brow. I see him still in thought as I recall that meeting. He was the kind of man to make a king of. He really was a king,—one of Christ's kings. And it was to tell us of the kingdom he had won for Christ, and was ruling in Africa, that he stood up that day to speak.

One of the first stories he told was to explain to us the difficulties a missionary met with in Africa then. There were white people out there, farmers and others—Boers they were called—who hated the black people, and who were angry with missionaries for coming to teach them concerning Christ.

One of the first troubles Mr. Moffat had was with a man of this kind. Mr. Moffat was travelling to the country of the Bechuanas. At the close of his first day's journey, he saw a farmhouse on a hill near by, and he offered to preach to the people of the farm in the evening. When evening came he went up to fulfil his promise. The service was to be held in the large kitchen. A long table stood in the middle, and the Boer himself, his wife, and six grown-up boys and girls sat at the top. There was a large Bible on the table where Mr. Moffat was to sit. Below the table lay half-a-dozen dogs. The Boer pointed to the Bible, but Mr. Moffat did not begin. He was waiting till the

congregation gathered. But nobody came. There was going to be no congregation except the Boer family and the dogs. But Mr. Moffat said, "Will the workpeople soon be here?" "Workpeople!" cried the farmer. "Did you say workpeople? Do you mean the Hottentots—the blacks? You aren't waiting for them, surely? You aren't going to preach to them?—to them? to the Hottentots? As well preach to the dogs below the table there as to them!" He spoke in a loud angry voice, and cried out a second time: "Hottentots! preach to them? As well preach to the dogs as them!" Mr. Moffat was a very young man then—only twenty-one—and preaching was new to him, and this strange conduct of the Boer put him out for just a moment or two. But God came to his help. God put it into his heart to change both his text and his sermon. He had been going to preach, if I remember right, from the words, "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son;" but now, inspired by God, he turned to the words which the Syro-Phœnician woman spoke to Jesus, and gave these out for his text: "*Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*" Then he paused a little, and read the words over slowly a second time, looking, as he did so, straight at the Boer's face. Then once more he stopped a moment or two, and again he read the words. But the Boer could not bear the third reading of them. He cried out in an angry voice: "Well, well then, bring them in." And soon the lower end

of the kitchen was filled with a crowd of black men and women. And to them Mr. Moffat preached. It was a sermon blessed of God. Ten years after that Mr. Moffat was passing the farm again, and several of the workpeople, seeing him, ran down and thanked him for telling them in that sermon the way of Christ.

I was very much struck with the kindly way Mr. Moffat spoke about black people. He had nothing of that scorn of black people which so many have. This came out in a beautiful story about one of his black converts, a woman, who came to him one day to ask the meaning of a verse in Isaiah. She had been busily puzzling out the meaning of it herself; but was not sure that she was on the way to the real sense. "Daddy," she said to Mr. Moffat, "you will not laugh at me? my face all dark! sun shine on only one little bit—one tiny bit of cheek in me. Your face all bright! sun shine over all your face! I read in prophet, 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; . . . and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.' Is Daddy's dark child right?—the real asp will always be asp, and the real wolf a wolf; are these but the thoughts and wishes of the hearts that are like wild beasts'? And does the prophet mean that hearts that were once filled with sins as bad as scorpions, and lions, and wolves, shall by Jesus be filled with good things instead?"

"Yes," said Mr. Moffat to the woman, "that is the

very meaning of the prophet. And may Jesus fill the heart of my daughter with the good things that do not hurt."

One of the best things he told us that afternoon was about his school. He was teaching the Bechuanas to read. But he could not get them to remember the letters of the alphabet. One day a happy thought came to him. He would set the letters to a tune. And so he did. He taught them to sing the alphabet to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne." The difficulty was at an end. The people got the alphabet by heart in no time, and would go singing it in the fields as they were at their work, and when they were sitting at their doors in the evening.

By-and-bye he got bits of the Bible translated for them, and printed in their own language. Many of the Bechuanas became Christians. A church was built; Sunday services were held; and the life of the people changed from bad to good.

Mr. Moffat told us two stories to show us what the people round about—the people who had not yet become Christians—thought of the gospel and the work of the Mission. The one story made us laugh. The other, for gladness, almost made us cry.

The story that made us laugh was this. There was a very wicked chief not far off, a swearing, drunken, cruel wretch. He could not bear the missionaries; and especially he hated their books. He hated their books because he saw that whenever any of his drink-

ing companions began to read the books they ceased to be drunken, and turned away from him and his evil ways. Now this man had a dog that was as wicked and savage as himself. And it was a favourite sport with the master, when Sunday came round, and the Christians began to go past to the church, to set his savage dog at them to bark and snap at their heels. One Sunday afternoon a strange thing happened. The dog swallowed a psalm book. The way was this. Mr. Moffat had got the psalms printed and bound in a little book by themselves. For boards he used sheep-skin, and sometimes the skins were new and soft. A good old lady, who had been at church in the morning, came out to the door of her round hut in the afternoon to read her book of psalms. And like some people in this country who read psalms in the afternoon, she fell asleep. And while she slept, the psalm book, with boards not long since cut from a new skin, fell out of her hands to the ground, and the wicked chief's dog passing at that moment, and smelling the new skin, thought it was a savoury morsel in his way, and snapped it up, and chewed it and swallowed it, skin and psalms and all. And just then the good old Bechuana lady awoke, and saw the last vestige of her psalm book going down the dog's throat. "Oh, you wicked, thieving dog!" she cried. "Have you swallowed my psalm book?" At that moment the dog's master came up. "What!" he shouted out; "has my dog swallowed one of the Christian books?" He

stamped, he raged, he swore wild, bad oaths. He said that his dog was spoiled now. It had eaten a Christian book, and would be good to bite and tear never more.

You see, although that was a bad man, and although he did not mean to say a good word about the Gospel, he was really bearing witness that the Gospel did one thing thoroughly: it turned bad lives into good. He believed it would take the savageness even from a dog.

The story that almost made us cry for gladness was this. When Mr. Moffat first went into Bechuana-land, the different tribes and villages were always having war. And in their wars they were very cruel. If a traveller from a distant village happened to come their way, he was certain to be robbed, or killed, or made a slave. This was a great grief to Mr. Moffat, and he said to himself, "By God's help I shall bring these wars to an end, and have the different tribes to live at peace with each other." He began with his own tribe. He got his Bechuanas to put their clubs and knives, and bows and arrows away. He got them to give up going to war, and to learn trades and farming instead. One consequence of that was, that strangers could travel through their country and neither be robbed nor hurt. And this came to be talked about over all that part of Africa. And even people who did not know what the Gospel was spoke of it as a wonderful magic, that brought wars to an end, and put robbery and murder away.

Well, it happened that there was a large village a

good many miles away, which Mr. Moffat had never been able to visit. And one day he rode up to visit it, and see if he could get the people to receive a missionary. You know what an African village is like. The huts are round, like bee-hives, and they are ranged in circles with the doors to the inside, looking to a large open place in the centre. When a traveller comes near a village of that kind, he sees only the backs of the outside houses. And this was all that Mr. Moffat saw. But a good while before he came near, he heard sounds of singing ; and the singing got louder and sweeter the nearer he came. He rode in through the gate, but he saw nobody standing about. He went along one of the streets, but nobody was at the doors. Then he rode forward into the open place at the centre, and he found the singing was there. The place was filled with women and children, and there were a very few old men ; but all the strong grown-up men of the village were absent. Just at first they were afraid of him ; but that soon passed away, and he got them to begin their song again. And this was the song, or at least what echo of it I can remember, whose sweet sounds had reached him as he rode through the desert :—

“ Mammy’s man will come again !
He has gone to the land of Jesus ;
Baby’s dad will come again !
He has gone to the land of Jesus.

“ There is no murder there !
There are no robbers there !

There is none to hurt them there,
In the land of Jesus.

“ They will bring corn and cloth ;
They will bring brass and iron ;
They will dandle the children,
When they come from the land of Jesus.”

You may imagine with what joy Mr. Moffat listened to this song. The land of Jesus about which the poor people were singing, was just his own part of the Bechuana-land. Those who were singing knew nothing about Jesus except this, that His servant, the missionary, had made wars to cease in the country to which their husbands and sons had gone to trade. But they knew this well. And they put their joy in it into a song. And they were singing for joy that they would soon see their husbands and fathers back among them again safe and well.

I hear still, after forty years, the sound of Mr. Moffat's fine voice, as he repeated that song, and came over and over the words,—

“ There is no murder there !
There are no robbers there !
There is none to hurt them there,
In the land of Jesus.”

Dr. Moffat has now himself gone to a still better land of Jesus. He has gone where his noble wife and daughter, where Dr. Livingstone, and Bishop Mackenzie, and Mrs. Chalmers, and Tiyo Soga, and many another friend and fellow-worker in Africa have gone before. He has gone to the land where so many of his personal

friends are, our own Dr. Struthers, Dr. Robson, and Dr. Raleigh, and Baptist Noel, and Dean Stanley, and many, many more. He will be glad to hear the sound of their singing as he comes near. He will be glad to meet his dear ones again. But, I think, among the crowds in heaven who will rejoice to have the saintly old man in their company again, none will rejoice more heartily, none will thank God more fervently than the Bechuanas, whom he brought to the Saviour when he was a missionary in their land.



A BIBLE PICTURE.

A BIBLE PICTURE.

“Like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”



WAS staying for a few days on the banks of the Hudson, in America, and my host drove me to see some rocks called the Palisades. It was one of the hottest days of summer. The road went up through half-cleared brushwood and forest. The grass, the wayside flowers, the leaves on the trees, had a withered and sickly look. The labourers in the fields seemed to be weighted with lead as they swung their scythes. The horse was covered with sweat. And we ourselves had long since sunk into silence, anxious only to shelter our heads from the pitiless heat.

Suddenly we passed into a cooler air. The shadow of great trees covered us; and my host halted his horse to let it cool.

“Come this way,” he said, when he had made horse and waggonette fast to a fence. And he led the way through the trees and down a footpath into a hollow, where there was a spring of the clearest and coolest water. The brushwood leaves had made a rich border

all around its edges, but underneath, the water stole and made a way for itself down the centre of the hollow and beyond, until we could see the gleam of it shining like a thread of light for several hundred yards.

As we sat in this delicious coolness, enjoying both the water and the shade, I was struck with the difference of the leaves in this hollow with those we had seen by the way. They were green and fresh, like the leaves of spring. Then I remembered a word in Jeremiah about "the man that trusteth in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is, that he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when trial cometh ; but her leaf shall be green." And I said to myself, "Here in this hollow, on the banks of the Hudson, is the very picture which Jeremiah saw long ago in the East, and it is showing forth still, to all who will see it, the beauty, the freshness and the joy of being a child of God."

It is a Bible picture ; and among Bible pictures there is none more beautiful or true. "Like a tree planted by the waters." How fair, how pleasant to the eye a tree so planted is ! Its leaves do not wither ; its strength does not fail ; it brings forth its fruit in its season. And under its branches in hot days there is refreshing shade for both man and beast. And such as that is every child of God—so fair, so fresh, so fruitful to the very end of life. As the ninety-second Psalm says : "They shall bring forth fruit in old age : they shall be fat and flourishing."

Where the prophet Ezekiel has to describe a multitude of God's children he uses the same picture. He describes a multitude of trees on the banks of a river. And he also tells how those trees come to be so fair and plentiful. It is because they are nourished by the river of the life of God in the world. And this river of the life of God in the world is just the Gospel. It is the Gospel, partly in the Bible, and partly in the lives of God's people. Ezekiel takes us to the door of a church, and points to a tiny little spring of water trickling out from under the steps. As small a thing as that is the first preaching of the Gospel. It is a still small voice, a single word, a little thing sent out from the church—sent out into a new country where nobody yet knows of God's love. But just as the spring that trickles out of the earth becomes a little stream, and the little stream deepens at every step—up to the ankles now, and now up to the knees—until by-and-bye it becomes a great stream in which swimmers can swim, and fishermen cast their nets, so with the preaching of the Gospel. Once begun, it spreads through the entire land; and then, just as when a river has deepened and spread in a land great trees spring up on its banks and make a forest, so, as the goodness of God's love comes to be talked about and carried from one to another over all the land, people who did not know God and did not care for Him are drawn to Him; and tens, hundreds, and at last thousands are seen worshipping and serving Him with gladness of heart. The land is filled with them.

On the old highway between Jerusalem and Babylon, in the days of the great King Solomon, lay a far-spreading wilderness. Travellers could find in it neither shelter, nor resting place, nor food. The King said, "I will build a city for shelter and for rest in this wilderness." Far up among the hills were springs and rivers of water. The King caused canals to be cut in the sides of the hills and along the plains to the heart of the wilderness. And there on the banks he planted palm trees for food and for shelter, and beside them streets of houses for refreshment and rest. And he called the new city Tadmor—the City of Palms; but some time in after days it came to be called Palmyra.

In the second Book of Chronicles it is called Tadmor in the wilderness.

I once heard a minister preach from the text, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree," and he told the story of Tadmor. It is a long, long time since I heard that sermon. It was back in a time long past, when one or two old ministers chanted their sermons as if they were singing the prose psalms. And this minister said, singing as he spoke, that the story of Tadmor in the wilderness was just a type, a parable, of the story of the Christian Church.

"Tadmor!" he exclaimed; "Tadmor in the wilderness! Palmyra, the City of Palms! The great King Solomon went up to the hills where the springs of water were, and made wells and tanks and waterways down into the waste places of the plain. And there he

planted his palm trees. And under their shadow he built his houses and streets and walls. And it was a city in the wilderness ; a city for refreshment and rest ; and the weary traveller, hot with the toil of the desert, and parched and hungry, saw the stately trees from afar, and rejoicing hasted on, and entering found shade and rest and food. That was Tadmor in the wilderness, the city which the great King Solomon built—Palmyra, the City of Palms.

“And that is the story of Zion, the city of our God. Just that same purpose is served by its citizens in this wilderness of earth. They are set like palm trees for shade and for refreshment to poor travellers by the way, who have not yet found rest in God.”

It is a picture of the same kind which John sets before us when he has to write down for us his visions of heaven. The citizens of heaven were just like those described by this old minister, and by Ezekiel, and by Jeremiah. They are planted by the river of God's life. There is in John as in Ezekiel a river ; but whereas in Ezekiel it is seen flowing out from under the steps of God's temple, in John it flows out from under His throne. But it is the same river—the river of God's life—that gives life to His people. And the picture of His people is also the same : on either side of the river was there a tree of life—living trees, many trees, but of one sort—trees with life in them—“ which bare twelve manner of fruit every month.”

A river, river banks, trees on either bank, shade in

summer heat, fruit in the time of fruit : a world as fair, as fruitful, as cool, as lovely as spreading fruit trees on river banks,—that is the picture of heaven, and the picture of the people of heaven, which John beheld in Patmos.

And I cannot help thinking how sweet that picture would be for John. He was a captive in the mines and quarries of Patmos, wearing the chain and toiling at the tasks of a captive. Day by day he would be driven out under the hot sun, with others chained like himself, to toil and suffer, shut in by the tossing waves of the bitter sea.

How pleasant to him the visions sent by God of a quiet country which no sea shut in, which had a river of fresh water flowing through it, and river banks all covered with beautiful trees ! That would seem to him just like heaven. And just like that, but fairer far, heaven will seem to all who enter it : A beautiful country ; God's life flowing through it like a river ; and God's children flourishing and bringing forth fruit like palm-trees on the banks of a river ; and all of them drinking up life from the river of the life of God, which is flowing even now, in this very world, in his Word and in the lives of His people, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in that Holy Spirit which every child may have for the asking.

A SERMON ON PLAY.

THREE PORTIONS.

I. CHILDREN PLAYING.

II. PURPOSE OF PLAY.

III. POEM BY A FRIEND.

A SERMON ON PLAY.

THREE PORTIONS.

I.

CHILDREN PLAYING.



WAS staying the other night at the house of a friend, and the lesson at evening prayer happened to be the chapter in Zechariah in which the words occur, "The city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets." That will be my text this evening.

It was the old City of Jerusalem that was meant. Only a few years before no children could be seen in the streets. The city itself was in ruins. Its walls were thrown down, its houses burnt, its streets deserted. Its people were slaves in Babylon. But that evil time was coming to an end. Builders were building up the broken walls, and Zechariah had been sent by God to cheer them at their work and to tell them of good times coming. There shall be happy homes once more in the old city, and the streets of it shall be full of boys and girls at their play.

But best of all, this New Jerusalem which comes down from God out of heaven is not some city in a far land which we cannot enter till we die. It is the city the dear Saviour brought down out of heaven when Himself came; the city He tells us of in the Sermon on the Mount which is to give light unto the world, and which He speaks of in the parables as the kingdom of heaven. It is on the earth now, it is in every home where Christ is loved; it is in every Church and nation where God's will is done.

And what is better still, what the prophet said of the Old Jerusalem is true also of the Jerusalem which comes down from God out of heaven. In the New Jerusalem as in the old, the streets shall be full of boys and girls at their play. And boys shall grow up to manhood and girls to womanhood in the service of its King, and in the joy of a dwelling-place which shall also be the dwelling-place of God.

In every city where Christ is King, there shall be boys and girls at play.

I cannot tell you how beautiful this seems to me, that this should be part of the glad tidings of God. It shows that the sight of boys and girls at play is a pleasure to God Himself. I really think it is a pleasure to everybody who loves God. Dr. Martin Luther was a great lover of God. He once sent a letter to his little son John about children in heaven. And he described them even there as at play. "I know a lovely and smiling garden," he said, "full of children dressed in

robes of gold, who play under the trees with beautiful apples, pears, cherries, nuts, and prunes. They sing, they leap, they are all joyful. There are also beautiful ponies with bridles of gold and saddles of silver. In passing through the garden I asked a man what it meant, and who were the children. He replied: 'These are the children who love to pray and to learn, who are pious and good children.' "

That is a garden, not a city; but it is the garden where Christ is King. And it is like the city in this, that it had boys and girls in it at play. Pious and good the boys and girls were, lovers of prayer and learning; but after that, happy with play. I have not seen this garden as Luther did. But I believe in it. It will be in that garden as Zechariah said it was about to be in Jerusalem. Whether in the garden, or on the streets of God's city, the children will be at play. And even now in this world, in the city where we live, I never see children like you at play but I think it is a little foretaste of the new Jerusalem dropped down into their lives.

On this account I am going to speak to you for a little this evening about play.

Play is neither idleness nor folly. It is one of the many good things which have come into your life from heaven. It is a gift from God. It is one of His wonderful works. When He made the beautiful earth and the sky, and the body and soul of man, He made the happy play of childhood. It is part of your life as truly

as prayer is, as truly as the soul itself is. And it is part of the life of children all the world over.

I spent some weeks, one summer, driving from place to place over the land. Every day we were passing through towns and villages and lonely farms, and everywhere we saw children like you at play. Boys were trundling their hoops, or chasing their balls, sailing their ships, or playing at marbles or cricket. Girls were skipping and singing and dancing, or sitting in groups on the doorsteps dressing and nursing their dolls. I recall some children who were playing at kings and queens, and others who were soldiers, marching to battle with flags flying and drums beating at their head. And almost every day we saw children bursting out of school and rushing at once to their games. It was the same beside the lonely farms as on the streets of villages and busy towns. The farm children were making caps of rushes, or daisy chains, or wreaths of flowers, or they were chasing butterflies, or they were blowing the feathers from the dandelion head to find out the hour, or they were making houses of turf, or playing at hide-and-seek among the ricks of hay. The same thing would be seen by other travellers on other roads that summer. Every day renews the sight. And if it were possible to journey with the sunlight and see all that it sees, and go round and round the globe with it, we should everywhere see the same sight. In every quarter of the globe, wherever human homes are built, among people of every race and nation, black people

and white, we should see children happy at their play.

Now, the first thing I want you to see is—that this playing of you boys and girls in the streets, or anywhere else, is a pleasure to God. He is a God so kind and loving that He delights in everything innocent that is a delight to you. Just as He delights in the songs of birds and in the colour and fragrance of flowers, He delights in the play of childhood. It was because He was thinking of it as a pleasure that He sent Zechariah to tell the builders of Jerusalem the good news that children should soon be playing in their streets. It is no joy to God when the streets of cities are empty of children. It is sickness, or famine, or cruel war that empties the streets of children. It is a joy to God when peace and plenty and health bring them back again, and the streets are alive and musical with their songs and play.

I have sometimes thought that I have seen little glimpses of the pleasure that God takes in your play. I have seen a mother sitting at her door on a summer afternoon, laying her sewing down that she might enjoy the sight of her children at play, and I have said to myself: "Something like the joy of that mother is the joy of God." I know a poet who made a song on the happiness of poor children at their first day of play in spring. All the winter they were shut up in their homes for want of shoes. But now, the winter was past and the sun shining and the air warm. And "the

bairnies," barefooted, but happy, "were out on the pavement again." The poet watches them as they skip and dance and play. He enjoys their joy. It is real gladness to him that

" Their wee shoeless feet have forgotten their pain
As they walk in the sun on the pavement again."

And oftener than once, when reading that song, I have said : "Something like this must be the joy of God as He looks down on the same sight."

II.

PURPOSE OF PLAY.

I want you next to understand why God has made play a part of your life. For one thing, He wants you to be strong. He has work waiting in the years to come for every boy and girl on the earth. And although it is not all the same kind of work, all of it is work which will want strength for the doing. Therefore He will not have you always at tasks. He has divided the time for tasks with times for play. And He has made it a joy to you to be at play. He will have you out in the open air. He will have you drink in the breath of the sea and of the moorland when you can. He will have head and throat and arms and limbs and inside and outside of you bathed and fanned by every passing breeze. And by your games He will have your body in endless motion. You shall run and not be weary. You shall leap and dance and race and climb, so that

every part of you may be made strong for the work that lies before you in life.

For another thing, God wants you to have a happy gateway into life. Nobody can tell beforehand whether your after life shall be happy. But God in His love has secured that the time of play shall be happy. I look back to that time in my own life. I would not, for a whole world, have it taken out of my life. It is the same with almost every one. The time of childhood which you are in now, when your companions and you romp and run and fill up your days with games, will become a memory to you when you are old, which shall be worth more to you than thousands of gold and silver. I have heard old people telling the story of their happy childhood. The world was all fair to them then. Their hearts leaped up when they saw a rainbow in the sky. The stars, the hills, the sands and waves of the sea, the running streams, the woods, the open parks in cities, the very streets themselves were a wonder and a delight to them. Those were the days when every day seemed like Joshua's for length, and when a year looked like a stretch of the eternal years. So wonderful, so fresh, so full of delight were those days and the happy play enjoyed in them, that one looking back upon them once could only tell out the delight of them by saying, "Trailing clouds of glory do we come, from God who is our home."

There is one more reason I should like to mention

why God has made play a part of your life. He wants to train you to be fair and just, cheerful and unselfish. In games you are joined together, just as we who are old are in our toils. The playground is a little world. And you cannot have pleasure in any of its games unless you try to have the others playing with you as happy as yourself. You have to learn to forget self. You have to try to consider the wishes of others. To be unkind, or unjust, or unfair, or ungenerous in a game is to spoil it, or bring it to an end. Even to be ill-tempered and sulky is to spoil a game. Perhaps you never thought that the Lord Jesus has left us a word about children sulking in their play. But He has. He liked to see children at play. And it was a pain to Him when they sulked and spoiled the game. There was a play in His time that He often looked at in the market places, and perhaps in His boyhood took part in. It required two companies : the one, of children pretending to be a marriage company ; the other, of children who had fifes and harps and were a band of music. When the play went well, the marriage company stopped before the young musicians and danced to their music. Sometimes the game took a sad turn, and instead of a marriage it was a funeral. But all the same it was play. Now the Lord had seen the play spoiled because some of the children sulked. He had seen the vexation on the faces of the children who were willing to play, and had heard them complaining that they had played the wedding music and their

companions had not danced, and the funeral music and they had not mourned.

But now I will bring my sermon on play to an end. I shall be glad if what I have said helps you to see God's love more clearly than before. The more we know of God, the more we see that He deserves our love. And surely this is a new rich addition to our knowledge of Him, when we discover that the same kind Father who gave His Son to die for us, that He might deliver us from sin and death, made the joy and play of boys and girls on the streets. May His blessing rest abundantly on you all! The time of playing on the streets is a good time while it lasts, but it will soon come to an end, and you will be carried by the years that lie before you far away from it. But may it always be a happiness to you to look back at it! May you carry something of the joy of it all through life with you! In days when, perhaps, your eyes shall be brimming over with tears, may you see the clouds open behind you, and hear anew the songs and pleasant cries of your childhood, like the far-off murmur of a sea of happiness on whose shores you once played! And at such a time, may it be borne in upon your mind that God has been so good to you, that He has set your life between two worlds of joy—the world of your happy childhood and the world that awaits you in heaven! And may that vision help to dry up your tears and renew your trust in God!

III.

POEM BY A FRIEND.

The Rev. A. Crichton Alexander, of Stoke Newington, has kindly permitted me to print the following poem, in which the teaching of my text is carried farther than I have done. It formed the close of a sermon preached in Douglas U. P. Church, April 22nd, 1883.

In the following lines he tells how he came to write the poem :—

*We laid her in her little grave,
The Darling of a short, bright day ;
And in the hush we caught the shout
Of children in the street at play.
O Death, to still her winsome mirth !
O Grave, and is she now thy prey ?
Tears came. I heard a voice from Heaven,
HER voice, in victory, answer, Nay.*

“ And the streets of the City shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”

JERUSALEM, the Joyful,
I love to think of thee ;
Within the many mansions
Is endless jubilee ;
And, blending with the worship
Of saints who sing for aye,
Is heard the blithe street-music
Of boys and girls at play.
O pleasant streets of Sion,
Whose stir is free from strife !
There flows the gladdening river,
There grows the tree of life :

And there the young Immortals
Keep holiday at will ;
They who on earth were playful,
In Heaven are playful still.

They play, those holy children,
And nought can soil or tear
In all their pretty gambols
The robes of white they wear.
They run about in safety,
For nought can hurt them now ;
The seal of their salvation,
God's name, is on each brow.

And there is no more crying ;
No threat is heard, no jeer ;
And lost in love's full triumph,
The coward sense of fear ;
And every boy is gentle,
And every girl is sweet ;
And fondly do they welcome
New playmates to the street.

Ah ! should we grudge their going,
Though early called away !
Or grieve, when Christ says, Suffer
The little ones to play,
He listens to their laughter,
As to the saints who sing ;
And in their joy is joyful,
As they are in their King.

O boys and girls of Douglas !
When playing in the street ;
When, in your own clear river,
You wade with bare, brown feet,

Be sure that this same Jesus
Is watching you the while ;
He loves to see you happy ;
Be happy in His smile.

Let no bad word be spoken,
Let no ill deed be done ;
But serve the Lord with gladness—
The mirth of your sweet fun.
And seek to have His blessing,
Both in your work and play ;
That so His joy be in you
Now, henceforth, and for aye. Amen.



ON FINDING GOD.

ON FINDING GOD.



WHAT is the best thing that can happen to a child? The best thing that can happen to a child is to find God. To find God is better than to find treasures of gold and silver, or pearls and diamonds, or seas and countries which nobody had found before. To find God is to find new life, new thoughts, a new heart, a new world, and delights that never grow old.

And God may be found. And He is very earnest that He should be found. In the sermons which the old prophets preached at His bidding He shows this earnestness. He sent them up and down to tell everybody to seek after Him. And speaking for God, they say, that all who seek Him early and with their whole heart are sure to find Him.

The same thing is said by Jesus, only in His sermons it is Himself He bids us seek. "Come to Me," He cries. "Come to Me if you are hungry, or athirst, or weary, or heavy-laden, or sick, or blind." Coming to Christ and finding what we need in Him is all the same as coming to God and finding God.

And in His preaching, as in the preaching of the prophets, He says that whoever will seek Him early and with their whole heart shall surely find Him.

God is as earnest to-day as in the old days of the prophets, or of Jesus, that people everywhere should seek after Him. He is as near now as He was then. And now as then He is calling to all, both old and young, to seek Him until they find Him. It is His voice we hear when we listen to lessons from the Bible. The Bible is just God speaking to us. Its words are all the same as if they were coming from the lips of God. And out of every page and book, prophets and apostles are calling to us and saying: "Seek the Lord. Seek Him if haply you may feel after Him and find Him. Those who seek Him early and with their whole heart are sure to find Him."

So to-day I am going to take up this old cry of prophets and apostles and of the Lord Himself and speak to you about finding God. And because it is not easy—at least at first—to understand what it is to find God, I intend to begin by telling you of some who found Him and of how they came to find Him. And that will be my sermon this evening. I hope next Sunday to be able to show you how God makes all things in our life, especially our troubles, work together to help us to find Him. And on the Sunday following, I shall take you along one of the saddest paths ever trodden by man, and point out to you the steps by

which a lost soul was enabled to find God in the very shadow of death.

First of all, then, I am to tell you of some who found God and of how they found Him. Of the first of these you know so much already that I will do little more than name him. You have all read the story of Samuel. He was a good child from his birth. But he was only a child. And although it is certain that he would say his prayers every day, and also learn portions from the books of the law, he yet, being only a child, perhaps never seriously thought about God. He did not think about Him, for example, as he thought about his mother. And it would not kindle joy in his heart that God was near to him, as it did that the time for his mother's visit was near. He thought of the place where the lamps were, and of his own work in keeping the lamps burning, as things belonging to the worship of God. And he would think of his old master Eli, as the priest of God. And perhaps he might even sometimes have thoughts about himself as one whom his mother had given to God. But never, till the night when God called him, did he find God Himself. But on that night he really found Him. He heard His very voice. He felt himself to be in His very presence. God was near to him, speaking to him, calling him into His service. He was never more to be far away from him. From that night, Samuel knew that God was as real as his mother, and more closely related to him than either his mother or

Eli. From that night the thought of God was never absent from his heart. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he knew and felt that God was present. And he never afterwards thought of himself except as the servant and prophet of God.

I was returning from London the other day, and there happened to be sitting opposite to me a lady who had spent the greater part of her life in South Africa. She told me many very pleasant stories about the Christian Fingoes, and one of these, one of the most interesting, was a story of a Fingo girl who found God. Her name was Sarah. One day—it was a Sunday—she was sitting outside the hut where she lived, and she heard the bell of the mission chapel calling the people to worship. As she listened, the ringing seemed to pass into speech, like the ringing of the bell that called Whittington back to London. This Fingo bell said, as plainly as if it had been a human being, “Sarah, come to Jesus. Come to Jesus, Sarah.” She was startled. The bell was calling to her, was calling her by her name, was calling her to Jesus. She rose. She could not help rising. The bell kept calling, “Sarah, come to Jesus. Come to Jesus, Sarah.” She went straight to the chapel, and that day, in the good words spoken, she found God. “Yes,” she said, when telling afterwards what took place, “God showed me that day that Sarah’s heart was as black as Sarah’s skin.” But He gave her a happier vision than that. He also showed her the blood of Jesus, shed for her, that made the

black heart white. And Sarah became a Christian. And during a long life she lived near to God, walking with her husband and her children continually in the fear and society of God.

It was my good fortune to be present once at a religious meeting in a church in Ireland where a gentleman who had lived many years in Spain gave an account of some wonderful providences in his life. Among other things he told about his finding of God. He was five-and-twenty years of age before he found Him. Up till that time, he never thought about God, and never felt that he ought to think about Him. He thought only about himself. He had been brought up in a happy home; he had had a good education; he had plenty of money; he could go wherever he liked. And he liked to be going about. It was the greatest pleasure of his life to go from place to place seeing new scenes. New countries, new seas, new hills and rivers, —these were an endless joy to him. But he never thought of God in connection with them. Often in these new scenes he would watch the clouds casting their shadows on the hills, and the sunlight making beautiful the land and sea; he delighted to climb the highest peaks to see the sun rising, or to watch it setting when it filled the sky with gold; and by the beauty which was in these things his heart was stirred. But he never thought of it as beauty which God had made, nor was he thankful to God for his joy.

A time came to him, however, when this empty and

poor life was to come to an end. He was on his way to Spain, and was stopping in Paris for a night ; and having no friends in that city, he went to a theatre to spend the night. He had gone early, and was waiting till the play began. All around him was a murmur of people waiting like himself and talking to each other. There were noises also of people coming in and finding seats. And the orchestra were busy, getting into their places and preparing to play. But suddenly all the noise and movement seemed to cease. And he seemed to himself to be alone, in a lone land, and apart from everything and everybody in the house. And all at once the thought rose up in his heart that he was now five-and-twenty years of age and that up till that moment he had been spending his life in the mere search for pleasure. He was a lover of pleasure more than of God. "Was this the purpose of my Maker?" he asked himself. "Did God breathe the breath of life into me only that I might find my delights in clouds and sunshine and land and sea? Was it for this that Jesus died for me?" He thought of the cross, and of the Saviour dying on it to bring him to God, and of the poor life he had been leading, and of the fact that he had never cared for God, nor for the glory of God, nor for the love of God. He thought of the happy home he had been brought up in, of the good education he had had, of the money he possessed, and said to himself: "Have I received these so many and so rich good things and all those years never

felt thankful to the Giver, nor offered Him anything in return ? ”

He rose from his seat, whether after the play had begun or before he never could tell, and went to his hotel. There he shut himself up with the Bible which he had always carried in his valise, but never read. And that night the old life fell away from him, and a blessed new life began. That night he found God. And as one who has discovered that he was not his own, but Christ's, he gave himself to Christ, to live to Him and to serve Him for evermore.

When I was telling you the story of the Fingo girl who heard the bells calling her to God, the thought passed through my mind that that is what the bells in all the churches are doing. I am sure thoughtful people feel that not the bells only, but everything connected with churches, should be calling us to God. I have often heard it said that the sermon especially should sound as if God Himself were calling us. But it is not so commonly known that God speaks to us through the psalms and hymns as well, and sometimes these reach our hearts when the sermon fails.

More than a hundred years have passed since a young lad in England, who belonged to a pious family, but was himself far from God, was to find God by this means. It was usual at that time to think and speak of all who were not Christians as rebels. They were rebels against God, and sin-laden and lost. This young man could not bear to be spoken of as a rebel,

or to think of himself in that way, and as a sinner and lost. But to all entreaties from his pious mother and others he answered by inwardly resolving not to become a Christian. In the good providence of God, however, it happened to his mother and himself to be on a visit to Ireland, and on a Lord's day they went to a place where a good man was to preach. This good man was that day very earnest in his sermon. He told the hearers that God was King and that men by nature were rebels. And at the close of every new passage in his sermon, he put the question to the unsaved present whether they would now yield to God and cease from being rebels. Every time the preacher repeated the question, the young man said in his own heart, "No, I will not yield, I will not yield." His heart was hardened against God. And at the close of the sermon, it seemed to be harder than ever it had been. But when the sermon was ended, the minister gave out a hymn. I never knew the very hymn ; but it had words like the one we all know which begins—

"Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore."

The congregation, stirred by the earnest sermon, sang the hymn with their whole heart. And what the sermon could not do the singing of the hymn did. It broke the hard unyielding heart. It forced a way into the very centre of the heart. It was the voice of God calling him through the hundreds of voices

that day praising God. His pride, his hardness of heart, everything that stood in his way to God, gave way. And that very day, the son that was in the far land found God and gave himself to be a loyal soldier for God for evermore. And he lived to be himself an honoured preacher of the gospel, and the writer of a hymn that has opened a way to God in thousands of hearts. He was Augustus Toplady, the author of the great hymn :—

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

I will for this evening stop. The stories I have told will, I hope, help you to understand what it is to find God. It is to find the thought of God and the sense of His presence in your heart. It is the first hearing of His voice in the words of the Bible. It is the discovery that God is your Father, that He gave His Son to die for you, and that there is a place for you, if you will have it, in His family circle and in His love. May it be the happy lot of every one who hears me to be a finder of God.



HOW TROUBLES HELP US TO FIND GOD.

HOW TROUBLES HELP US TO FIND GOD.



HIS evening I am to show you, as you will remember, how God makes all things, especially our troubles, work together to help us to find Him. We might think that trouble would drive us away from God and out of the way of finding Him. But it is not so. Very often God makes a way for us to Himself by means of affliction. That is the meaning of the hymn we sometimes sing:—

“Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me.”

Left to ourselves, not one of us would seek after God. We do not naturally care for God, or for the things of God. As Dr. Mansel said in his beautiful ballad of Simon the Cyrenian,—

“Often to the market, often through the town,
Carelessly and thoughtless, go we up and down,
Heaven but little heeded, deemed of little worth,
Caring only for the little things of earth.”

But it is never God's way to leave us in this state. He is not only wishful and earnest that we should seek after Him until we find Him, but He comes seeking after us as well, that He may find us. He does not will that any should fail to meet Him,—

“ But with tender goodness doth before us go,
Leading by a pathway that we do not know ;
Where we least expect Him, there He doth us meet,
In the quiet homestead, in the busy street.”

And as often as any place that could be named, He meets us in the sick-room, or in strait places when we are in the midst of trouble, and there and then He opens our eyes, and we see and find the Saviour.

I heard a little parable once, a long while ago—I never knew whose parable it was—which shows, in a very simple way, how trouble may lead to good. A very tiny bird, very young and helpless, which had never yet been outside of its nest, found itself one evening all alone. Neither father nor mother had come back from the afternoon flight. They had been shot or snared, or they had been caught by some hawk, or they had lost their way. And the poor little birdie in the nest, as I have said, was all alone. The light faded from the sky, the stars began to shine, but the old birds did not return. And in the morning when birdie awoke from its troubled sleep their place was still empty in the nest. “What shall I do?” cried the frightened little thing. It was cold, it was lonesome, it was hungry. Every morning up till this one its breakfast had been brought to it. Every morning up till this one when it awoke it heard the song and happy talks of its parents. But everything was changed this morning. The nest was not like the nest it used to be. And the heart of the lonesome little creature was like to break. And, as I have

mentioned, it was hungry. What was it to do? To remain in the nest was to die. And how to get where food was it knew not. The nest was high up among the branches of a thorn tree. The little bird climbed to the edge and looked down. The distance to the ground frightened it. To jump down was to be killed. To remain in the nest was to die for want of food. The choice for birdie was to remain in the nest and die of hunger, or leap to the ground and possibly be dashed to pieces by the fall. It resolved to risk the leap. As boys who are about to bathe in a river on a cold day stand for a moment or two on the bank and encourage themselves by saying, "Once, twice, thrice," and then plunge in, so did this poor tiny orphan of the nest stand for a moment or two on the edge of its home, looking down through the terrible distance, at the ground where its food was, so far, far beneath, before it took the final plunge. But then a strange thing happened. Although it threw itself down, it never fell. A something it had not known of before came out from its sides, that bore it up, that floated it, that gave it power to go down as gently as a feather. This something was its wings. And by its wings, which it came to the knowledge of by its troubles, it reached the food which He who so cares for the sparrow that it shall not fall to the ground without His notice had prepared for it long before.

There are many who are like this poor bird. It is through their troubles they come to learn the good

things which God has prepared for them and the way by which these are to be reached. There are many who would never think of God unless they were in some great danger or trouble. And it is by these troubles that very many are brought to Him. Do not think hardly of such people. Only God knows how many things shut out the hearts of some from Himself. And it is of His great mercy, of His untiring loving-kindness, that He brings souls of that kind into great straits, that they may be drawn to think of Him and find Him by their very troubles. I am going to tell you of two who, by their troubles, were made to think of God, and who, except for their troubles, might never have found Him.

About forty years ago there lived in a city of the north a beautiful young lady, who was very vain and very proud of her beauty. She lived, not to God, but to herself. And that is a bad kind of life to live. She never thought of God, never read the Bible, never thought of Christ's love, and never cared to know whether she was loved by Him or no. She dressed finely, she idled over empty books, she sewed pieces of fine needlework, she went to gay parties, she went to theatres, and to concerts, and to picture galleries, and to races, and to every sort of public gathering that was for pleasure and show.

But she did nothing for God, or for the poor, but only for herself. That was her life, an evil life. And she loved the evil that was her life.

Through the mercy of God, this young lady was struck down with a serious illness, and to all appearance was likely to die. Her doctor was a Christian man, and he soon came to see the poor and evil life which the sufferer had been leading. And his heart was filled with concern for her.

"My dear young friend," he said to her one day as he was about to leave, "I want to say one thing to you, if you will suffer me; I want to say and leave with you this one word: '*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.*'"

Then he went away. The young lady was never so surprised in her life. At first she was angry. What right had the doctor to mention sin in connection with her life? But her anger passed. The word remained. And all day long and day after day she could think of nothing else. "The blood of Jesus?" she said. "Did Jesus shed His blood for me? Did Jesus, whom I have never cared for, never loved, die that I might be cleansed from sin?" Her whole soul went out upon the verse which the doctor had left with her. She beheld for the first time in her life the love that brought Christ from heaven. She saw that it was love for her. In the light of that love, she saw how poor and evil her life had been. And by the help of the Holy Spirit, she was enabled to lay hold on the love of Christ and give Him the love of her own poor heart in return.

She did not die, as people expected. And when she was able to rise from her bed it was as a new being.

Her whole heart was filled with the thought of Christ's love for her, and her daily prayer ever after was : "Cleanse me, O Saviour, with the cleansing which is in Thy blood." And she became a Christian, and lived to God and to Christ and for the poor and the needy ever after.

The second story is this * :—

Not quite twenty years since three men, Baker, Strole, and White, were searching the river beds in Colorado for gold. The rivers in that part of America are different from rivers in our country. They do not run between green banks, with trees or corn-fields on either side, and so near that we can always see them and if we wish wade in them. They run deep down, hundreds, in some places thousands of feet down and out of sight, between great walls of rock. Imagine a range of mountains split lengthways from the ridge to the root, and a river flowing far down at the very bottom of the split, and tumbling over precipices, and rushing wildly through the darkness; that is how the rivers of Colorado flow.

One morning, the three men I have named, having slept overnight at the entrance to one of these slits, which in that country are called cañons, were coming up the steep sides of the cañon, to continue their search for gold. As they came near the surface, the

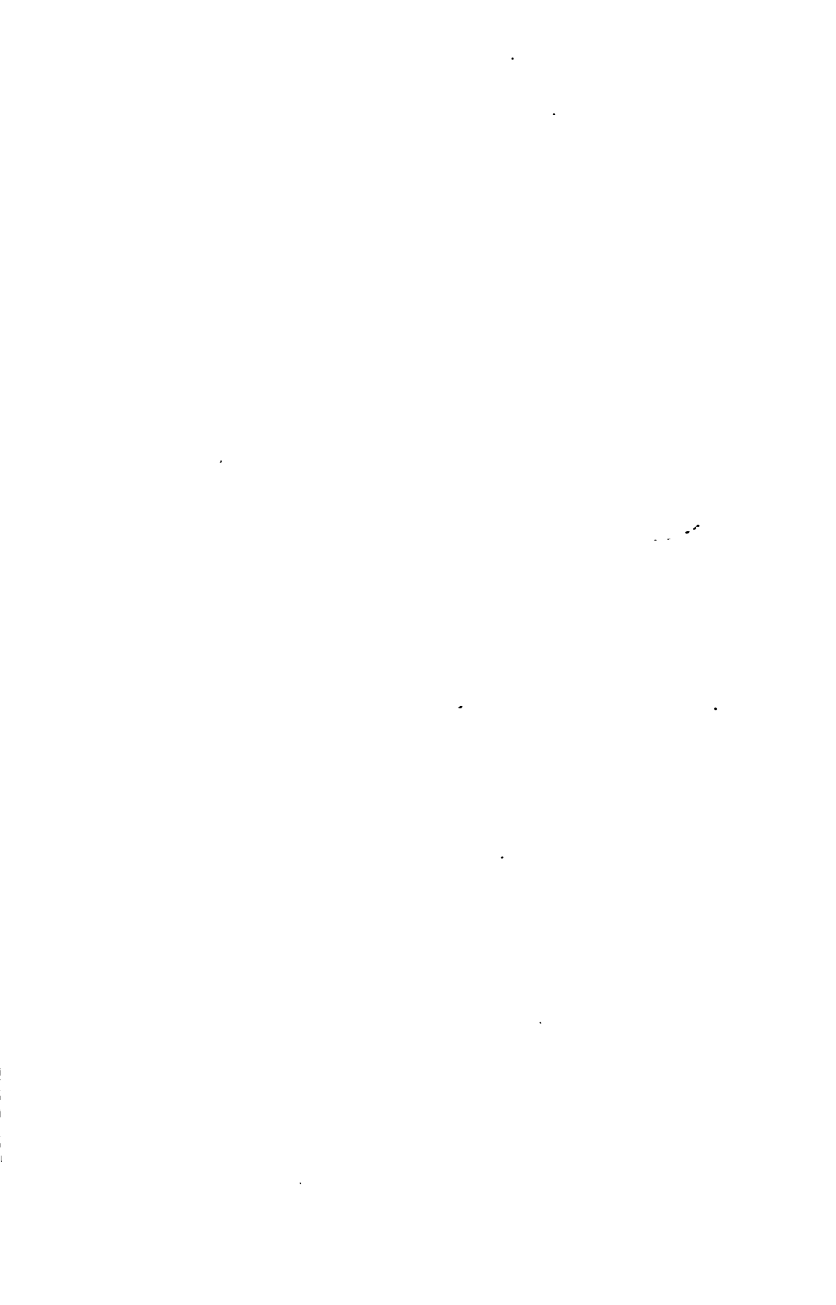
* Abridged from an interesting record of the survey for a Southern Railroad to the Pacific Ocean, by Dr. W. A. Bell : "New Tracks in North America," 1869.

wild war whoop of the Indians—the native people of Colorado—burst on their ear, and at the same time a shower of arrows and bullets fell on them. Baker was hit, and, as it turned out, so sorely that he died. And as he was captain, he cried to the other two to escape for their lives. But they were loyal men, and stood by their dying captain, facing the cruel savages and beating them back, until the last quiver of his strong body told them he was dead. Then they fled back into and down the cañon, or deep slit in the rocks through which the river ran. And thither the Indians were afraid to follow. At a bend of the river they found some driftwood, plenty and strong enough to make a raft. And with ropes and horse harness they had they made a raft, and tying a bag of provisions to it, they launched into the unknown stream. Never raft sailed on that stream before. As they went on, the darkness became nearly as great as the darkness of a tunnel, only, far up, they could see a thin line of open sky, over which, for one short hour in the day, the sunlight passed. Then night came, and there was total darkness. Higher and higher rose the walls on either side as they sailed further on. At one place they reached the height of a mile. Meantime the little raft sped on, but on a terrible voyage. The turns in the river were frequent, and the falls and whirlpools terrible. The men clung to the raft for dear life, the one keeping it from bumping against the sides, the other speeding it with a pole. Only the night before

their captain had told them that at the foot of the cañon, if it could be reached, was a village called Calville. And the hope of the two men was that they might arrive before long there. But one day passed, another, a third, a fourth, in the terrible darkness, on the terrible stream, and Calville was not reached. On the fourth day, as the raft was caught by the rushing stream and dashed round a sharp bend in the cañon, it went to pieces, and Strole, trying to guide it with his pole, was tossed into the roaring whirl of waters, gave a loud shriek, and was seen no more. White was now alone, and with a broken raft. A feeling of despair and terror came over him. He wished he had fallen in the fight with the Indians, as Baker had done. He felt the temptation to throw himself into the seething waters and end his sorrow where Strole's had ended. But the good Lord had something better in store for him. He helped him to put away those evil thoughts and bind the raft together again. Meantime, that Strole's fate might not happen to him, he tied himself to the raft. But when he searched for the bag of provisions it was gone. And thus, tied to the raft, in the awful gloom, on the awful stream, without companion, without food, the poor man launched once more. Alas! He was caught in a whirlpool fiercer and stronger than that which had swallowed Strole. The raft was whirled round and round and round. The thought came to him that he should whirl on there till raft and he sank. "This is the end," he said to

himself. He grew dizzy. He fainted. When he came to himself he glanced upwards. The rocks rose nearly a mile on either side. A red line along the open showed that it was evening. Then the red changed to black. And all was dark. And then and there, in that terrible depth, in that thick darkness, and amid the roaring of the whirling and rushing waters, the poor man found God. "I fell on my knees," he told afterwards, "and as the raft swept round in the current, I asked God to aid me. I spoke as if from my very soul, and said: '*O God! if there is a way out of this fearful place, show it to me; take me to it.*'" He was still looking up, with his hands clasped, when he felt a different movement in the raft, and turning to look at the whirlpool, it was behind, and he was floating down the smoothest current he had yet seen in the cañon. Six days more, and he came to a bank where the rocks disappeared and some Indians lived. From them he received food and started once more on his voyage. And three days later he came to Calville and to the homes of white men, where his troubles came to an end.

It was a terrible voyage, the most terrible perhaps ever sailed by man; but it had this good for White: it put the thought and faith of God into his heart. When, in after-days, he told the story to Dr. Bell, his voice grew husky as he described the awful scene in the whirlpool, the appeal to God, and God's loving and helpful reply.



A MAN ON A CROSS WHO FOUND GOD.

A MAN ON A CROSS WHO FOUND GOD.



HAVE been speaking to you about the finding of God, and you will remember, I promised to tell you of one who found Him in the shadow of death. And now I have to tell you it was the Thief on the Cross I had in my mind. And what I want to show you about him is, not only that he found God, but also the way by which God led him to Himself. This is the story I am to open up to you this evening.

Of the man's previous history we only know what is to be gathered from his own words and from the circumstances in which we find him. He was one of two men who were thieves and who were put to death when Jesus was. To look at, he did not seem to differ from his companion. No one could say that the one was that day to find God and the other not. He was a thief, just as his neighbour was. And there would be in him and about him all that the habit of thieving puts into a man, or draws up out of a man. There would be scorn of law, lawlessness ; there would be coarseness and perhaps brutality. He was really a thief: a man

who belonged to the thieving class. A poor, miserable form of a man. If you could enter a criminal court when the judges are sitting and see the people who come up to be tried, you would see the kind of man this was. Idleness and debasement are written on their very faces, and on their looks and movements and words and deeds. They are like a sheet of paper written all over with evil signs. The thief on the cross was just one of that class: a man acquainted with jails and chains and whipping-posts. A miserable creature. A thief. That and nothing more.

But no. I recall that word. He was something else besides a thief. He was a man, with a man's nature, with a man's wishes, with a man's heart. His face, although crime had put its bad marks upon it, once nestled on a mother's breast. Beneath the wretched form of his thieving life lay a real human story—a story of love and sadness, of tears and sins: a story that might have been of a different and better kind if he had had the advantages you and I have had—if he had had the half of our chances.

The first thing, then, in this story is, that he was a man who had lost his way, who had got into bad ways, had fallen among bad companions, and was now an outcast and a thief. By his own confession he was an unjust man, justly condemned to die.

But the next thing which I have to mention to you is the surprising joyful fact, that thief though he was, and bad though he was, he was still related to God,

that God was remembering him, and that it was in the heart of God to bring this lost soul to Himself before the day was ended.

I have no words good enough to say how good this second fact seems to me. It is the everlasting wonder of the Gospel, the mercy and pity of God for sinners, the heart of God yearning to bring sinners back to Himself. God knew the man's badness better than anybody else did. He also knew how bad his badness was. But He also knew that although he was bad, and very far gone in badness, he yet was neither a monster in human shape, nor a fiend, but a man, the work of His own hands, a man with a lost soul, a man sorely needing to be saved. To tell the story rightly I must take you back to the day when the Lord Jesus was put to death. I take you back to the old city of Jerusalem, in which the death took place—the city over which Jesus wept, and which only a few days before He had entered as a King. And I want you to follow me along the streets of Jerusalem, beginning at the door of Pilate's judgment hall.

It is morning. Three prisoners are brought forth by soldiers to be led to the place of execution. Each has been beaten with the cruel scourge. Each, weak though he be with the scourging, has to carry the crossbeam of the tree on which he is to die. A procession is formed; the soldiers and prisoners begin to move. There is the usual crowd on the sideways. The day is hot; the air is stifling. One of the three

prisoners is the thief whose story I am about to tell. He has his own sorrow that day ; but he is struck by the demeanour of one of his companions. He notices as the procession advances and this companion comes into view, that there is a murmur among the crowd. He sees that He is not like a common criminal. He observes that He is silent. But ever as they advance, he catches words spoken about Him by the crowd. One said, "This is the man who called Himself a King"; another, "That is He who said He was the Messiah"; a third, "There is the man who said to Pilate, 'I was born to bear witness to the truth.'" And a fourth said to his friend by his side, "Behold the man who put His trust in God and said He could build the temple in three days if it were thrown down." Other words, more wonderful still, fell on his ear. One who was weeping cried, "That is the gentle one who opened my eyes"; a second answered, "He raised my brother from the dead"; a third struck in, "I was possessed of evil spirits, and He cast them out." "Who can this be by my side?" the poor thief cried in his own heart. He did not know that all he heard that day was spoken in his hearing because God in that way was bringing the things of Christ, by which he was to be saved, near to his soul.

From the Sufferer Himself, whose approach brought out those words, no word fell. He continued silent. Worn, weary, as a sheep before her shearers, as a lamb brought to the slaughter, He was dumb, opening not

His mouth. But by-and-bye the murmured words on the side paths changed into bursts of sorrow. As the great Sufferer passed, grateful women in the crowd, and mothers and sisters whom He had blessed, burst into sobs and wailing. And then the silence of the Lamb of God was broken. But it was broken only to turn the sorrow of the sorrowing women to themselves. "Daughters of Jerusalem," He cried, "weep not for Me. Weep for yourselves and for your children, and for the days of evil which are about to be."

The poor thief was more and more filled with amazement; and more than ever, the question kept rising in his soul: "Who can this Sufferer and the Speaker of such words be?" Then he noticed that the Lord grew faint and sank under the burden of the cross. Then he saw the beam laid on Simon the Cyrenian, who was standing by. At length the procession arrived at Calvary. And once more he was struck by the silence of Jesus. He could see that loving friends were present and in tears. His mother was there, and friends of hers, and some of His disciples. And perhaps he heard some of their sorrowful words of grief, and what they said about the innocence and goodness of the Beloved One who was about to be put to death. He saw the title nailed on the cross of Jesus: "This is the King of the Jews." And then the terrible nails were driven in, through feet and hands, and the Innocent One and the two thieves were hung up on the crosses and left to die.

To die in that way, on a cross, with nails driven through the tender flesh of hands and feet, is one of the most horrible deaths. The sufferings are terrible. And it is no wonder if the sufferers are made mad by what they suffer, and in their madness break out into curses and reproaches and evil words.

But the wonderful thing which the poor thief I am telling you about noticed in Jesus was that He began to pray. Not only so. It was a prayer for the very people who were putting Him to death that he heard : " Father, forgive them ; they know not what they do." Although he would be suffering the same terrible pains as the others, he was arrested by this prayer. It was prayer to a Father ; it was prayer for enemies. More than ever rose in his soul the question : " Who can This be Who on the very cross prays for the men who put Him there ? "

Perhaps it was the madness caused by the pain he suffered which made the other thief break out into reproaches against the Lord. But it was wicked, inhuman cruelty which led the priests and scribes standing by to take up the reproaches and cry in mockery : " He saved others ; Himself He cannot save. Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend from the cross, that we may see and believe."

The evil men who uttered those words did not know that their words were to bring light and salvation to one of the sufferers there that day. But it was so. They were—without intending it—lifting up the glad

tidings concerning Christ to the thirsting heart of the listening thief. Everything he saw and heard that day went to his heart and became a preacher of Christ to him. Christ's own conduct, the title on the cross, the prayer to His Father, the prayer for His enemies, and now the words "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," and the other words "Christ, the King of Israel," went to his heart.

Racked by pain though he was, his spirit was stirred by what he heard. Ideas that had lain slumbering in him from his childhood rose to the surface of his soul. His whole being was moved. Through the prayer of Christ there came to him the vision once known, long lost, of a Father—a Father, a Hearer of prayer, a Father who had forgiveness even for enemies. And in Christ he was near to One different from everybody he had known, One who could pray for His enemies. It was a revelation of things that had been hidden by his sins from his eyes. And higher than ever rose the question: "Who can This be by whose side I am here to die?"

Two things were made by the Spirit of God to bring light to him. First of all, the inscription on the cross of Jesus: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews"; and next, the words of the cruel taunt: "If Thou be the Son of God, the Messiah, come down from the cross."

Little by little, over the waves of pain he was suffering, dawned the grand truth which was to save

his soul. It was borne in upon him that this Sufferer so near, so silent, so blameless, was really the Son of God, and the promised Messiah and King of Israel. His eyes were opened. He saw God in the suffering Lamb of God. The things that were that morning unseen to him opened their gates and drew him gently within their light. And in that light he found God.

Be sure this was not the first time God had tried to bring him to Himself. More likely it was the last stage in a long journey by which God was leading him to the Saviour. I always think, when I read the prayer he addressed to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," that behind its words shines, although dimly, the fact that he was a poor Israelite, not a heathen ; that he knew the Israelites' hope of a Messiah ; that perhaps he had been taught it when he was a child, by his mother ; or by his father when he was still an innocent boy. And there it lay, from his early years until now, in his heart, a light shining in a dark place, a light that only God could have kindled and kept burning. And it is this very light that came out in the prayer : "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

There is just one thing more in the story. Could the holy Jesus listen to such a man ? Was there any hope that a man so lost, so stained with crime, could have favourable answer to such a prayer ? It was great faith that spoke in him ; his faith made him

very bold ; but could there be any answer to his faith ?

The answer was the granting of his prayer. The Saviour did not repel him, did not put his prayer away. He pitied him. He accepted him. He assured him that on that very day he should be with Himself in Paradise. "This day, O stained life, O broken heart, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

That is the wonderful story. In the shadow of death, amid the pains of the cross, this poor lost one found God. He found God, and his soul was saved. His life was lost. There never could come a time when he would not regret that his life had not been lived to God. But he himself was saved. He found God, and finding God, found heaven. That very day he was admitted into the joy and fellowship of the eternal world. And he found God—to God be given the glory !—because God in His great mercy had watched over him, perhaps through long years had sought after him, and amid the very shadows of death found him.

