

Reminiscences of Robert Browning.

BY REV. F. W. FARRAR, D. D.

I have heard Mr. Browning narrate two stories, both of them Eastern legends about King Solomon, which impressed me much. One was as follows:

I had been telling him the well-known Mohammedan myth, how Solomon, in his intense pride in the horses and chariots, which were a dubious and half-forbidden innovation among the adjuncts of Jewish royalty, had once been surprised in the midst of his review by the voice of the muazzin (Eastern legends are always perfectly indifferent about anachronisms) and the summons to the evening prayer. Not knowing how to attend in time to this religious duty, Solomon magnificently consecrated all his forty thousand horses to Allah and his service. In reward for this service, Allah presented him with a magic carpet, which would at a wish transport to any distance the person who sat upon it. Once, as Solomon was consulting his Grand Vizier, Azrael, the Angel of Death passed by and gazed curiously at the Vizier, who instantly, in alarm, entreated the King to lend him the magic carpet, and bade it transport him to the centre of Arabia. No sooner had he gone than Azrael said to the King: "I looked at that man so closely because, having been bidden to summon his soul from the centre of the great desert, saw him, to my surprise, standing here with you."

Mr. Browning agreed that the legend was a magnificent illustration of the two truths, that no man can ever escape his destiny, and that often he fulfills it more certainly by the very endeavor to escape it. "But," he added, "I have heard the legend in a far finer form. In this version the King and the Vizier were standing together on the topmost pinnacle of the temple, to which they had ascended by a vast flight of steps. As they stood there talking they saw a man approaching them with his head bent; but as he came to the foot of the steps, he cast one glance upward and in that one glance both of them recognized the awful lineaments of the Angel of Death. He began slowly to mount the steps and then the terrified Vizier, borrowing the magic carpet, desired to be transferred to the loftiest summit of Caucasus. The angel ascended the steps and said to the King: "I have come because I was bidden to take the soul of your Vizier from the top of El Bronz, and I saw him here." "Angel," said the King, bowing his head and pointing with his finger, "he awaits thee on the highest peak of Caucasus!"

The other legend was that of the death of King Solomon, which the late Lord Lytton heard from Mr. Browning, and clothed in magnificent verse in his "Chronicles and Characters." The king had gone into the holy place to worship, and while he stood there in his jeweled crown and in all the golden splendor of his royal robes, the finger of Azrael suddenly touched him, and he died where he was.

"Leaning upon the ebony staff,
Signed with the seal of the Pentagram."

The corpse stood motionless in all its perishing magnificence, but the awe of the great king—

"To whom were known, so Agar's offspring tell
The powerful vigil, and the starry spell,
The midnight call Hell's awful legions dread,
And sounds that break the slumbers of the dead"

kept all men, even the chief priests, from drawing near or touching him, while all the demons also were kept apart by the graven spell. Then forth from the temple wall crept a little brown mouse, too insignificant to feel any reverence. It knawed away the leather at the bottom of the staff and lo, suddenly the gorgeous figure fell flat upon its face and slipped into ashes, and out of the dust they picked a golden crown!

In his "Mr. Smudge, the Medium," Mr. Browning expressed his contemptuous disbelief of what is called "spiritualism," and poured disdain upon the tricks of which professional "mediums" often availed themselves. But one day, when I was talking to him on this subject, he admitted that there were many apparently curious mysteries of thought-transmission for which he could not readily account. He said that once in Italy he met an Italian count who had the reputation of being able to read thoughts and to tell of occurrences by handling objects connected with them. The count knew that the poet was entirely skeptical as to his possessing powers, and said to him: "Have you anything on your person to which any history is attached?" Mr. Browning said "No"; but a moment after he remembered that he was wearing a pair of sleeve-links to which there was a history. Correcting himself, he said: "Oh yes, these sleeve-links are associated with a remarkable occurrence." Mr. Browning's grandfather had been a resident in the West Indies, and his uncle had there been murdered by slaves, and these sleeve-links which he had been wearing had been taken from his corpse. The count laid them on the palm of his right hand and after looking intently

first at them and then at Mr. Browning, exclaimed, "It is a very strange thing, but as I look at these sleeve-links I hear a voice crying in my ears, 'Murder! murder!'" That the count could not have heard the story beforehand Browning was certain; he thought it possible that he might have made a lucky guess, or have conjectured something from the expression on his face.

From what Eastern source Mr. Browning had derived the legends of Solomon, I omitted to ask; but he was the most omnivorous reader I ever met—far more so than Lord Tennyson—and he seemed (as indeed the range of his allusions show) to know something of everything. I believed that when he was writing "Sordello" he exhausted every book in the British Museum which touched on the little known story of the Italian poet. The accuracy with which he mastered even the most recondite allusions to his subjects before he fused them together in the crucible of his imagination was most remarkable. His memory, too, was very retentive. He once repeated to me a great part of the poem of poor George Smart on David, which he regarded as reaching a very high poetic level; but he had read everything from Busbequius to Beddoes—for whom he told he had a high admiration, when I had quoted to him some lines from his dramas. This accuracy was extended to the minutest and most apparently insignificant details. In Florence it is possible to identify the very spot on which he was standing when he bought for a few pence the old paper copy of the trial of Count Guido, which suggested to him his longest, and in some respects most remarkable poem, "The Ring and the Book." The copy is still preserved by his son who showed it to me, with other relics of his father, when I dined with him in his Venetian Palace, in which I saw the truckle bed and simply furnished upper room in which his great father had breathed his last.—The Independent.

Children and the Church.

BY REV. THEODORE L. GUYLER, D.D.

In the olden times every Hebrew father and mother received this commandment from the Lord: "Thou shalt teach these words diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

I am a thorough advocate of the Sunday-school when properly managed, but I protest against giving it the false name of "the children's church." It is no such thing; it is only one spiritual department in every well-organized church. Christian parents have no right to shirk the solemn responsibility which God lays upon them, and to farm out the whole religious instruction of their children to the teachers in the Sunday-school. Underneath the foundations of both church and common-wealth lies the household; it is older than either of them, and there is no such school of Bible religion in the land as a clean, well-ordered, God-honoring home. Of this "church in the house," the parents are the heaven-ordained pastors. I can add my own personal testimony to that of millions of others, that the right place to begin religious instruction is at the fire-side. My own early home was in the house of my grandfather; and our rural church was three miles away. I was the only child in the family, and the first Sunday-school that I ever attended had only one scholar, and my faithful widowed mother was the superintendent. She gave me a portion of the Bible to be committed to memory, and of this she gave explanations; she also required me to study God's Book for myself, and not to sit still and be crammed by a teacher after the fashion now too prevalent in many Sunday-schools.

In my godly mother's home school I committed to memory whole chapters of the Scriptures, and was well grounded in sound doctrine by the catechism, which I fear, has been supplanted in too many families by the godless Sunday newspaper. During my infancy that mother had dedicated me to the Lord as truly as Hannah dedicated her son Samuel. Of course I was taken to God's house on the Sabbath, but it was my beloved mother's steady, constant influence that led me gradually along, and I grew into a religious life under her potent training and by the power of the Holy Spirit working through her. If all parents were like her, the "church in the house" would be the best feeder of the church in the public sanctuary.

I have ventured to introduce this leaf from my personal experience because it emphasizes the vital truth of parental responsibility, and it illustrates what Dr. Horace Bushnell, in his masterly treatise on "Christian Nurture," calls the "out-populating power of the Christian stock." Before the pastor comes the parent. Most children are chips of the old block; then how vitally important that the old blocks should be sound timber. I have often said that to train up a family wisely and for the Lord requires more "gumption" than to write a book, and more grace than to preach a sermon. It is on the preaching and the

practice at the "door-posts" depends the extension of the church and the moral safety of the commonwealth.

The word "church" is popularly used in two senses, sometimes it designates the house for divine worship, and sometimes it more accurately signifies the spiritual body of Christ which worships in that edifice. It is a painful and indisputable fact that the attendance of children upon what the Scotch call the "diet of worship" is steadily decreasing. Many parents seem to think that if their boys and girls go to their Sunday-school that is enough. I often officiate at the morning service in churches where the children do not compose more than one-tenth of the congregation; sometimes scarcely a child's face is visible! Where are the children while their parents are in the house of God? Are they amusing themselves at home or wandering in the streets? Be assured of this, my good friends, that if your boys and girls do not form the habit of attending church now, they are not likely to do it in after years. They will soon be riding a bicycle on the Lord's day towards their own spiritual destruction. In this matter of church attendance, the parent and the pastor must combine. The parents should require and expect the children to accompany them to the sanctuary as much as to sit at their table for their daily meals. The pastor should endeavor to win them to church by making his sermons simple in language, earnest in delivery, and interesting with illustrations. Very few sermons are fit to be preached at all which are beyond the comprehension of an average boy of ten or twelve years old, and grown people relish fresh, simple, vivid, practical preaching as much as their children do. "Papa, he means you," whispered a lad of ten years to his father when I was preaching last Sunday at an up-town congregation in New York. Some ministers are accustomed to deliver a brief sermon to children before their regular discourse; this custom increases the attendance of the juveniles. The elder Dr. Stephen H. Tyng always preached to the children at the Sabbath afternoon service, and drew a large adult audience. "He whips us over the shoulders of our youngsters," remarked one of his flock.

The utmost care should be taken in the reception of children into the church. Haste and injudicious handling may work irreparable mischief, especially during seasons of revival, when sympathetic currents of emotion run strong. Parents and pastors need wisdom from above in dealing with young souls; they cannot be rushed into the church by the "wholesale." Each one should be made to understand the solemnity and import of the step to be taken, and the appeal should be made to the conscience rather than to the emotions. Conduct is a better test than mere feeling, and if the Holy Spirit is at work, than the result is the genuine fruits of good character and Christian living. A Christian parent is the heaven-appointed trustee of a child's soul, and a Christian home the best training-school for the church of God. As long as the Old Testament contains the command of religious instruction at the "door posts" of home, and as long as the New Testament contains the words, "Suffer the children to come unto me," so long must the foremost duty of parents and pastor, of churches and Sunday-schools be to save the young for Jesus Christ.—Christian Intelligencer.

If comparisons are odious and invidious, here is one sample, with the odds largely against the popular drama, which infiltrates so many minds with social dissipation, and unfitting them for the sober realities of life:

"Protestant churches give annually to Foreign Missions \$11,200,000. Dion Boucault says: 'The amount paid for theatrical entertainments is two hundred million dollars.' Eighteen dollars given annually to maintain the theatre, whose influence is corrupting, which the country could dispense with to its moral advantage, for each dollar contributed to send the gospel to the heathen."

"Therefore, with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." (Isa. xii, 3). In illustrating these most beautiful words, a writer remarks:

"It is said that a man who came to Mahomet, asking what monument he should erect to the memory of his dead friend, received the brief answer: 'Dig a well.'"

"In Oriental countries the reply had a force hard to understand in our own land at the latter part of the nineteenth century. The old wells dug by Hebrew patriarchs give water to-day to thirsty flocks and wearied shepherds, though the cities built near them have perished from the earth, and sheep pasture where palaces and temples once reared their heads.

"The Eastern traveler, scorched by the tropic sun, who satisfied his thirst at the well-dug centuries before, found a beautiful suggestiveness in the assurance that he should draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Truly, he who digs a well, or opens a spring of limpid water, or plants a tree, is a benefactor to future generations. If you can do no more while you live, at least go and plant a tree. So far forth you will be a benefactor of the human race.