

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

"HERRINGS FOR NOTHING!"

I was recently appointed to labour for a short season down by the sea on the coast of Lancashire. A large building was taken for services on the Lord's day; but from uncontrollable circumstances there were no local friends to help in the work. Accordingly, on the morning of the Sabbath I presented myself at the Assembly Rooms, and was shown by the hall-keeper into a very handsome and spacious hall, where all the needful preparations had been made for public worship. I had brought a boy with me to distribute hymns, and leaving him without, took my place to wait for the expected audience. The time announced was half-past ten . . . I waited until the time appointed; but *no one* came. I waited on, with the same result, feeling more miserable and depressed than ever before; still no one came. A few of the theatricals peeped in upon me, and some of the tavern waiters; but none entered; and at eleven o'clock my patience was exhausted, and I left the place, to meet at the door the feigned and mocking condolences of the theatricals and waiters aforesaid. The sea-beach was but a few yards distant, and full in view; and the long esplanade fronting the sea was literally black with people, walking, lounging, and sitting, in the calm sunshine, and inhaling the gentle breeze from the sea.

And as I walked along in utter loneliness, I felt most keenly the Master's wisdom in sending out *two* and *two*. If I had had only one friend, the feeling of loneliness would never have been experienced; but I was alone. Then I lifted up my heart to the Lord, asking that my utter failure might yet redound to His glory in the attempt I now resolved to make to speak in the open air.

On a spot where the beach shelved gently down I took my stand, with my back to the sea and my face to the crowded esplanade above. I read, as loudly as possible, Isaiah lv., and then engaged in prayer. So prepared to speak for Jesus, I looked fully round for the first time, and there were hundreds of people stopping to hear. I had to abandon the sermon I had prepared, and to cast myself on the Lord for a word in season; and then I commenced as follows:

"I want you to think of a bitter east wind, a declining day, fast falling snow, and a short muddy street in London, at the far east. Put these thoughts together and add to them the picture of a tall stout man, in a rough great-coat, and with a large comforter round his neck, buffeting through the wind and storm. The darkness is coming rapidly, as a man with a basket on his head turns the corner of the street, and there are two of us on the opposite sides. He cries loudly as he goes 'Herrings! three a penny! red herrings, good and cheap, at three a penny!' So crying he passes along the street, crosses at its end, and comes to where I am standing at the corner. Here he pauses, evidently wishing to fraternize with somebody, as a relief from the dull time and disappointed hopes of trade. I presume I appear a suitable object, as he comes close to me and commences conversation:

"Governor, what do you think of these 'ere herrings?"

"As he speaks, I note that he has three in his hand, while the remaining stock are deftly balanced in the basket on his head.

"Don't you think they're good?" and he offers me the opportunity of testing them by scent, which I courteously but firmly decline; 'and don't you think they're cheap as well?"

"I assert my decided opinion that they are good and cheap.

"Then, look you, governor, why can't I sell 'em? y'er have I walked a mile and a half along this dismal place, offering these good and cheap uns; and nobody don't buy none!"

"I do not at all wonder at that," I answer.

"Tell us why not, governor; tell us why not."

"The people have no work at all to do, and they are starving; there are plenty of houses round here that have not had a penny in them for many a day; was my convincing but unsatisfactory reply.

"Ah! then governor," he rejoined, 'I've put my foot in it this time; I knew that they was werry poor, but I thought three a penny 'ud 'tempt 'em. But if they haven't the ha'pence, they can't spend 'em, sure enough; so there's nothing for it but to carry 'em back, and try and sell 'em elsewhere. I thought by

selling cheap arter buying cheap, I could do them good, and earn a trifle for myself. But I'm done this time."

"How much will you take for the lot?" I inquired.

"First a keen look at me—then down came the basket from his head—then a rapid calculation—then a grinning inquiry—

"Do you mean profit an' all, governor?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll take four shillin', and be glad to get 'em."

"I put my hand in my pocket, produced that amount, and handed it to him.

"Right! governor, thank'ee! What'll I do with 'em?" he said, as he quickly transferred the coins to his own pocket.

"Go round this corner into the middle of the road, shout with all your might, 'Herrings for Nothing!' and give three to every man, woman, and child that comes to you, till the basket is emptied."

"On hearing these instructions, he immediately reproduced the money, and carefully examined it piece by piece. Being satisfied of its genuineness, he again replaced it, and then looked very keenly and questioningly at me.

"Well," I said, 'is it all right and good?"

"Yes," said he.

"Then the herrings are mine, and I can do as I like with them; but if you don't like to do as I tell you, give me my money back."

"All right! governor, an' they are yours; so if you says it, here goes!"

"Out of sight myself, I stood at the corner to watch his progress; and speedily he neared the house where a tall woman I knew stood at the first floor window, looking out upon him.

"Here you are, missus," he bawled, 'herrings for nothing! a fine chance for yer; come an' take 'em!"

The woman shook her head unbelieving, and left the window.

"You're a fool!" said he, 'but they won't be all so. Herrings for nothing!' A little child came out to look at him, and he called to her, 'Yer, my dear, take these into yer mother, tell her how cheap they are—herrings for nothing.' But the child was afraid of him and them, and ran indoors. So down the street, in the snowy slush and mud, went the cheap fish, the vendor crying loudly as he went, 'Herrings for nothing' and then added savagely, 'Oh, you fools!' Thus he reached the very end; and then turning to retrace his steps, he continued his double cry as he came, 'Herrings for nothing!' and then in a lower but very audible key, 'Oh, you fools!"

"Well!" I said to him calmly, as he reached me at the corner.

"Well!" he repeated, 'if yer think so! When you gave me the money for herrings as yer didn't want, I thought you was training for a lunatic 'sylum! Now I think all the people round here are fit company for yer. But what'll I do with the herrings, if yer don't want 'em and they won't have 'em?"

"We'll try again together," I replied; 'I will come with you this time, and we'll both shout."

"Into the road we both went; and he shouted once more and for the last time, 'Herrings for nothing!"

"Then I called out loudly also, 'Will any one have some herrings for tea?"

"They heard the voice, and they knew it well; and they came out at once, in twos and threes and sixes, men and women and children; all striving to reach the welcome food. As fast as I could take them from the basket, I handed three to each eager applicant, until all were speedily disposed of. When the basket was empty, the hungry crowd who had none was far greater than those that had been supplied; but they were too late; there were no more 'Herrings for nothing!"

"Foremost among the disappointed was a tall woman of a bitter tongue, who began vehemently, 'Why haven't I got any? ain't I as good as they? ain't my children as hungry as theirs? Why haven't I got any?"

"Before I had time to reply, the vendor stretched out his arm towards her, saying, 'Why, governor, that's the very woman as I offered 'em to first, and she turned up her nose at 'em."

"I didn't," she rejoined passionately; 'I didn't believe you meant it!"

"Yer goes without for yer unbelief!" he replied. 'Good-night and thank'ee, governor!"

As I told the story upon the sea-beach, the crowd

gathered and increased, and looked at each other; first smiled, and then laughed outright.

It was my time then I and I said, "You cannot help laughing at the quaint story, which is strictly true. But are you sure you would not have done as they did; been as unbelieving as they? Nay! are you sure you are not ten thousand times worse than they? Their unbelief only cost them a hungry stomach a little longer; but what will your unbelief cost you?—God—not man—God has sent His messenger to you repeatedly for many years, to offer pardon *for nothing!* peace *for nothing!* salvation *for nothing!* He has sent to your houses, your home, your hearts, the most loving and tender offers that even an Almighty God could frame; and what have you replied? Have you taken the trouble to reply at all? Have you not turned away in scornful unbelief, like the woman? or ran away in fear like the little child?"

"Take warning by that disappointed crowd of hungry applicants. When they were convinced the offer was in good faith, and would have gladly shared with their fellows, they were *too late!*

"Let it not be so with you! Do not *you* be in that crowd of disappointed ones, who will be obliged to believe, when belief will not help them."

As I looked earnestly upon that vast crowd upon the sea-shore, the laughter was utterly gone, and an air of uneasy conviction was plainly traceable upon many faces.

"Will you not come to God by Jesus now?" I entreated. "He is waiting, watching for, pleading with you! there is salvation, full, free, and eternal, uttermost, complete redemption—*all for nothing!*"

Though we had no place to retire to, it was good to walk up and down on the beach, showing the way of God more perfectly to some who were attracted and impressed by this commencement of a sermon by the sea.

HEART'S-EASE.

A pretty little village, nestling among the great mountains that surrounded it on all sides, as if they would fain shelter it from all outside cares and trouble, and very peaceful indeed it looked, with the sunset glow of a summer evening flinging its radiance over vale and hill, and embracing the whiteness of the pretty little cottages that mainly composed the village. Old and young seemed alike to be enjoying the beauty of the evening, as they gathered in groups or rested quietly at their cottage doors. With one of the latter I tarried to speak a few words in admiration of the small flower garden which, I well knew, was the pride and delight of the old man's heart. "Did you ever see finer pansies than these, ma'am," he said, exultingly, as he gathered a few and gave them to me. Certainly I never did, for their rich dark beauty was only equalled by their perfect formation and the soft cream-like shading petals.

"Pansies for thoughts," I said, "they suggest very peaceful ones, I think."

"Don't you like the old English name for 'em best, ma'am? Heart-ease. 'Pears to me like it fits 'em better. They allars seems to thrive so contentedly in any out-of-the-way corner you puts 'em in, so lowly too, for all their being so much richer looking than many of their taller neighbours."

Quaint as the old man was, I was struck by the force and truth of his remarks.

The melody of a happy, trustful voice came floating out to us from an open window, and he added, "There's our village Heart's-ease singing now."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Only a neighbour of mine, ma'am, a young woman who has seen a deal of trouble, poor thing, but she is so happy and peaceful that the people round about here always call her 'our Heart's-ease,' and go to her whenever they are in trouble. They think it fits her just as it does the pansies."

A few days after, I determined to make the acquaintance of "our Heart's-ease," and made my way to the white cottage. Within a covered porch I found Alice Fern sitting, busily sewing on a little child's dress. As I looked upon the serene and peaceful face, I did not wonder at the name the villagers had given. After a little, I learned that she was a young widow, having lost her husband, a sailor, two years ago, just when she was expecting him home. Since that time she had been dependent on her own exertions, for supporting her invalid mother and her little child. A baby had died a year ago.