THE PROTECTOR
AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS.

"RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION: BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE."—Prov. xiv 34.

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BY THE REV. DR. SPENCER.

In the month of February 18—, I called at the house of a family which I had several times visited before. I knew them well, and my purpose was to make another attempt to do them good. They were very poor, their home was very uncomfortable, their apparel dirty and ragged, and, what was most mournful of all, these evils were manifestly occasioned by intemperance. The husband and father was an intemperate man, as all his acquaintance knew, and as anybody would know by the sight of him; and the wife and mother was an intemperate woman, as I was frequently told, and as the appearance but too plainly indicated. Such they had been for more than a score of years. They had several small children, who were miserably clothed, and repulsively dirty, appearing to be little cared for by either father or mother. They had one daughter, the eldest of their children, a very worthy girl, of about eighteen years, who was a seamstress, supporting herself in a very respectable manner, and moving in respectable society. But she seldom or never went home. She had left her parents because she could not live with them any longer. She once told me, that she could not endure the pain of seeing her father, and especially her mother, in such a condition as they were; and when she had sometimes gone home to see them after she left them, they only complained of her, and reproached her for her pride, because she had dressed herself in a decent manner, and because she would not consent to board at home any longer. Her mother had once requested me to induce her to return to them; but after learning all the circumstances, and hearing the daughter's touching story from her own lips, I had no heart to do it—I could not attempt it—I told the poor girl that, in my opinion, she was right in staying away. She could do them no good. She had tried it. She was only reproached if she called upon them. The treatment she received made her the more unhappy; and she once told me with bitter weeping, that if she went there at all, she "came away with such a feeling of shame, that it made her wretched for a month." It was a very delicate thing for me, and a very painful one, to mention the subject to her at all; but I trust I was enabled to do it in such a manner as to wound her feelings but little, and to gain her respect and confidence entirely. She certainly gained mine.

On the morning to which I now allude, I rapped at the door, and the old woman opened it and looked at me without uttering a word. She did not even respond to my "good morning;" and when I inquired more particularly how she was, in as kind and respectful a manner as I could, she scarcely made any reply at all. She did not ask me to walk in; but, as the door was open, and she did not forbid me, I passed into the house. Thinking that she might perhaps be a little disconcerted by my coming at a time inconvenient for her to see me, I told her, as I went into the house, that "I would not hinder her long; I had called for only a minute, to see how she was."

"I am glad to see you," said she, with a low voice and sullen look. She appeared so different from what I had ever seen her before, so downcast and sad, that I thought she might be unwell, and therefore inquired particularly if she "was sick."

"No," replied she, with a heavy sigh and solemn sculn, uttered in a low and sepulchral tone.

In order to make her feel at ease, if possible, I seated myself upon a chair. It was covered with dust; and her whole room, as I had often found it before, was so far from being decently clean, that I hesitated to sit down in it. Everything was in disorder. The floor had not been swept apparently for a week—the ashes were scattered over the hearth-stone—the scanty furniture was most of it broken, and resembling one of the chairs, which had but three legs, and was lying on its back—the ceiling was festooned with cobwebs, that had caught the floating dust, and as they waved to and fro in the wind, they appeared like a mournful token of the wretchedness which seemed to have taken possession of her heart.

I made several attempts to lead her into some conversation, but it was all in vain; she spake only in muttered monosyllables. This surprised me. I had many times visited her before, and had supposed that my attention to her, my familiarity and kindness, had entirely won her esteem and goodwill. Indeed I had supposed myself quite a favorite with her. Though I had sometimes reproved her very plainly, I had always done it affectionately, and she had always treated me politely, and as a friend. But now all was changed. She was cold and mute. She appeared very much as if she was angry, and moved about the room adjusting her little stock of furniture as if she was too sad or too sullen to be conscious of my presence. She scarcely noticed me at all.

Most sincerely I pitied her. I saw she appeared very wretched. I thought of her poverty, of her better days, of her youth, of her children, of her sins and her soul. She was of a respectable family, and had received a respectable education in her youth. I had often thought, in my previous conversation with her, that she possessed a superior mind. And now to behold her in this miserable condition, and no prospect before her of any relief, a disgrace to herself, to her children, wretched and heart-broken, was too touching a thing to allow of any other feelings than those of compassion and kindness. My heart bled for her. I could not have uttered a word of censure, even if my principles would have allowed it. I resolved to soothe and console her for a moment, if I could, before I left her. Said I:

"Mrs. B——, do you remember what I was speaking to you about, when I was here week before last?"

"*Yes*," said she, with a low and sepulchral voice.

"You know I told you that you had no reason to be discouraged."

"I know you did," said she mournfully.

"I told you that I thought you a woman of superior sense, and capable even yet of doing a great deal of good to yourself and your family."

"What can *I* do?" said she, in a tone of despair.

"My dear friend, I *told* you when you asked me that question the other day. With God's blessing, if you will seek it, you may do *anything* you wish—you may be respected and happy here, and be saved in the world to come?"

I paused, but she made no reply.

"Have you thought of what I told you *then*?"

She gave no answer.

"Have you any disposition to try to seek God, and aim to everlasting life?"

Still she was silent. Rising from my seat, and stepping towards the door, I said to her:

"I am aware that I have called on you rather early in the morning, and I will not hinder you any longer now. If you will allow me, I shall be glad to call on you at another time."

I offered her my hand to bid her good-bye, but instead of taking it, she placed her hand against the door to hinder me from opening it, saying in a firm and solemn tone, "*Don't go.*"

"I will stay longer," said I, "if you wish me to do so. I will do anything in my power for you, Mrs. B——, most willingly; but I suppose—" (lifting my hand to the latch)—

"*Don't go*," said she, placing her shoulder firmly against the door, to keep it from opening.

"What can I do for you?" said I.

She did not answer.

"Is there anything you wish to say to me, Mrs. B——? I hope you will speak freely to me. I assure you I will treat you with all kindness, and I think you know me well enough to trust me."

Still she did not answer. She stood like a statue of stone, her eyes fixed on the ground, her large frame bending slightly forwards, and her countenance strongly indicative of deep thought and melancholy emotions. She seemed lost in her own contemplations. I considered her for a short time in silence. She moved not—she spake not—she never raised her eyes upon me—she scarcely breathed. I knew not what to think of her. She appeared angry, and yet it was not anger. Her solemn look, fixed and indescribable, made her resemble one wrought up to an iron determination for some mighty purpose. Said I:

"Mrs B——, you appear to feel unhappy this morning. What has occurred that troubles you? or can I assist you in any way?"

She drew a long breath, but remained as silent as ever, lost in thought, or in some wilderness of emotions. I did not know what to make of her. Evidently she was sober. At first I had thought she was angry, but her voice did not sound like it, in the few syllables which she had uttered. I could not leave her, for she stood motionless by the door, in such a position that I could not open it without swinging it against her, to push her out of the way, she held me her prisoner.

I knew not what to say; but concluded to make another attempt to find what was occupying her thoughts. Said I:

"Mrs B——, I wish you would tell me what makes you so unhappy. I should think you *would* tell me; I have always been a friend to you, and I think you have reason to confide in me."

"I know you have," said she, as unmoved and solemn as ever.

"Then tell me what is the matter! what troubles you?"

"I am a *great sinner*!" said she, slowly and with deep solemnity.

"That is true, and a much greater sinner than you think."

"I am *such* a sinner!" said she, with a countenance as fixed and cold as marble.

"Yes, I am glad you have found it out; for now you will see the necessity of fleeing to that Saviour, of whom I have spoken to you so many times, as your only ground of hope."

"I am *undone for ever*!" said she, with a look of cold fixed despair.

"You *would* be, if there was no mercy in God, and no Christ Jesus to save. But God is able and willing to save all sinners who repent of sin and forsake it, and put all their trust in Christ."

"I have sinned a great while!"

"And God has borne with you a great while, simply because He is 'not willing that you 'should perish, but come to repentance.' Have you been praying to God to save you?"

"Yes, I prayed a long time last night; and I have been praying this morning till you came in."

"What did you pray *for*?"

"I prayed that God would forgive me."

"And do you think He will?"

"I am afraid not! I am a very great sinner."

"Jesus Christ, madam, is a very great Saviour. He will save all that come to Him in faith. The *greatness* of your sins cannot ruin you, if you will but repent of them and forsake them, trusting to the great Redeemer of sinners for pardon, through His atoning blood. 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'"

"*Will* God have mercy upon me now, after all I have done?" (fixing her eyes upon me, with a beseeching look).

"Yes, He will: He *says* He will. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

"I have been an awful sinner! I am a poor creature, unworthy of anything but God's curse!"

"True, all true, madam; but Christ is infinitely worthy, has borne the punishment due to sinners, and is willing to save you."

"I wish I could think so," said she, with the same fixed and despairing look.

"You *may* think so; God thinks so."

"There is no mercy for me an longer!"

"So *you* think, but God thinks differently. You and He do not think alike. He thinks right, and you think wrong. You must fling away yur own thoughts and act on His. And that is what He means in that expression in Isaiah, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*, and let him return unto the Lord, and He *will have* mercy upn him, and to our God, for He *will* abundantly pardon. 'for My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ays My ways, saith the Lord.' Your *thoughts*, madam, our very sincerest and soberest thoughts, are to be *forsen*. Your thoughts are wrong. Fling them away, and te God's thoughts. His thoughts are right. You think dferently from Him, and therefore your thoughts are not govern you. 'Let the unrighteous forsake his thoughs.' You think wrong about God, and wrong about yrself, and wrong about sin, and wrong about forgivene. I do not mean that you think yourself a greater sinr than you are, for you have not yet seen the half of youguilt and danger; but you think wrong about God's adiness to forgive you. Remember that He says, 'Let thunrighteous forsake his thoughts.' And then, a little air, He says again, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nd goes on to say, 'for as the heavens are higher th the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoghts.' What does He mean by all this? He means at it does not belong to you to tell what God will do orill not do. If you undertake to tell, you will be surto tell wrong, because you think wrong. You must letim *tell* what he will do. And he is telling in that very psage about the forgiveness which you say you cannohink there is for you: 'Let him return unto the Lord, d He will have mercy upon him.' But the sinner doesot think so; and therefore God says it over again, as He would beat it into the sinner's heart, 'Let him retu unto our God, for He will *abundantly* pardon.' (She shk her head with a slow desponding motion, as I went on You do not think so, but God does. He *tells* you, 'Thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways ways.' Your thoughts this minute are, 'I am a greatiner.' God's thoughts are, 'I will have mercy upon he Your thoughts are, 'I have sinned too long to be forgen.' God's thoughts are, 'I will abundantly pardonir.' I should like to show you that whole chapter. Jant to read it to you. Have you got a Bible Mrs. B——?

Without uttering a word, slowly moved from the door to the other side of the roo placed a chair beneath a high shelf, that was made of agle rough board, and hung up on rude wooden brass, almost up to the wooden ceiling of the room. She stepped up upon the chair, and reaching her h upon the shelf, felt along till she found it, and todown her Bible. She stood upon the chair, and gazed pn it as she held it in her hand, with a fixed look. Ts she slowly stepped down from the chair, holding hetble in her hand, and stopped and gazed upon it, motiless, and without uttering a word. It was covered all with dust, soot, and cobwebs, appearing as if it hnot been handled for years. I thought her heart smoer as she held it unopened and looked down upon it thought I could "see the iron enter into her soul." I not disturb her. I was willing she should meditand remember. There she stood, motionless as a stone, h her eyes fixed upon her Bible, and I did not think its best for me to say anything to her—the dusty, cobbed Bible was speaking! The tears gushed from thes, and fell in quick drops upon its blackened lid. Sy she lifted her tattered apron, and wiped off the tsand the dust, and deliberately turning towards me extended to me the book—"*There* is my *Bible*!" sahe, with a bitterness of accent that I shall never forgeShe turned from me, with both hands lifted her dueagged apron to lier ace, and wept aloud

I could not but weep too. It a scene surpassing, I am sure, the genius of any pain

When she had become a litmposed, I requested her to sit down by me; and then directing her eye to the expressions, I read and explained to her the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah.

I attempted some further conversation with her, but she did not seem so much inclined to talk as to listen. At her request I prayed with her; and when I was about to leave her, I enquired:

"How long have you been in this state of mind, Mrs. B——, feeling that you are such a sinner?"

"Since last night."

"What led you to feel so last night?"

"It was a little book that I read."

"What book was it?"

"Sixteen short sermons."

"Whose sermons were they?"

"I don't know. I came across the book somewhere about the house. I dont know where it came from."

"I mean who *wrote* the sermons?"

"I don't know."

"Where is the book? I should like to see it."

"It is not here. I lent it this morning to Mrs. A——" (a near neighbor).

"Did Mrs. A—— want to read it herself?"

"Yes: she was in here, and would make me tell her what was the matter with me; and after I told her, she said she wanted to read the sermons too. So I lent it to her, a little while before you came in."

Taking leave of Mrs. B——, I went immediately to call on Mrs. A——. I found her in tears. She had become alarmed about her condition as a sinner against God. She frankly expressed to me her convictions and fears, adding, with great emphasis, "What *shall* I do?" Of course I conversed with her and explained the way of salvation. But she said nothing about the book, until, as I was about to leave her, I inquired what it was that had inclined her to attend to her salvation. "It was a little book that Mrs. B—— lent me this morning," said she; and taking it from under her Bible that lay on the table, she put it into my hand. Then I discovered that it was a Tract, bearing the title, "Sixteen Short Sermons," one of the publications of the American Tract Society, which I had entirely forgotten if I had ever read it, so that I did not recognise it by the title.

After this, I often visited Mrs. B——, and had many an interesting conversation with her. In one of these conversations she referred gently and humbly to her daughter, and not, as I had formerly heard her, with manifest anger and ill-will. She said, "I should like to see her—I have not seen her for many months; but, I suppose, it hurts the poor child's feelings to come home, and find us—as we have been. I hope we shall not always be so." I immediately went to see her daughter; and alone and in as delicate a manner as I could, I told her of her mother's altered feelings, and suggested the propriety of her going to see her. She wept bitterly and long. It was almost impossible to comfort her at all; and before I left her, I found it was not her mortification and shame about her mother, so much as her anxiety about her own salvation, which caused her distress. She had already heard of her mother's seriousness, and that was one of the causes of her own. But she did not go to see her mother. I pointed her to Christ as well as I could, and left her.

A few days after this, I called upon the daughter again, and found her mother's happy hope in Christ, which she had just expressed to me for the first time; and to my no small joy and surprise, I found that the daughter had been led to the same sweet hope also. "*Now*," said she, the tears of joy coursing down her youthful and beautiful cheeks, "*now*, I can go to see *my mother*."

She did go. She opened the door, and found the old woman alone. "*My mother*," said she—and she could say no more. In an instant they were clasped in each other's arms, both bathed in tears of unutterable joy.

That humble dwelling soon became as neat as grace had made its inmates happy. The daughter went home. She aided her mother in all her domestic duties, with a glad and grateful heart. She made their house as attractive as it had been repulsive. She made clothes for the younger children, and having assisted her mother to dress them up in a neat and respectable manner, the old woman attended them herself to the Sabbath school, and requested to have their names put down, "for," said she, "they will always be here every Sabbath, if you will be so kind as to teach them the Bible."

That house and its inmates were very different in June from what they had been in February. Neatness and peace reigned, where there had been filthiness, and clamour, and contention, through year after year of misery. The whole appearance of the woman was changed. She did not look like the same being. She became dignified, lady-like, intelligent, easy in manners, and, though always solemn, she was uniformly contented and happy. "It seems to me," said she, "that I need but one thing more, and my cup is full; if my husband would only quit his ways, and turn to God, it seems to me we should be happy enough." But he never did. He continued his intemperance. I exerted all my skill to persuade him to forsake his ruinous course; but I met him thirteen years afterwards staggering in the streets.

Eight months after the time when I found this woman so suddenly awakened to a sense of her situation, by "a little book that she had read," I baptized both her and her daughter, and they were received into the church the same day. Mrs. A——, her neighbour, who borrowed the book, was received and baptized at the same time. When the old woman presented herself in the church for the reception of baptism, her old neighbours and friends, who had been acquainted with her for a score of years, did not know who she was, her appearance was so altered; and I found it difficult the next day to make them believe that it was verily their old neighbour, whom they had pitied and despaired of so long.

There was nothing of any marked peculiarity in this woman's religious experience, unless it was her deep humility; her iron determination manifest always from the beginning of her conviction; and after her conversion, her unbounded gratitude to God. "Who could have thought," said she, "that God would have mercy upon such a creature as I?"

That "little book," the "Sixteen Short Sermons," lent from house to house through the neighbourhood, did good service in that season of a revival in religion, which I have always supposed originated from its influence more than from any other one thing. However this may have been (and I believe there is a great deal of foolish error abroad among the churches in attempting to account for revivals of religion, and trace their origin), the name of Mrs. B—— stands recorded in my private book, the first name in the list of the hopeful converts to Christ in that revival.

As long as I continued to be her pastor, Mrs. B—— always appeared to me to be a humble and happy Christian. There was uniformly an air of deep solemnity about her, of profound humility, and a cast of mournfulness too, whenever she adverted to her past life, or the time of her hopeful conversion. The remembrance of what she was seems to have thrown a sombre shade over her character. Twenty years have passed away, and she still lives, enjoying the Christian confidence and affection of her church.

I have sometimes called upon her since I ceased to be her pastor, and removed to another and distant place. At one time I visited her after an interval of thirteen years. I did not expect she would know me. I knocked at the door—she invited me in—and, taking a seat, I asked some business-like questions about two or three of her neighbours. She responded readily to my questions, but kept her eyes fixed upon me, with a kind of curious and doubtful inquisitiveness. This questioning, and answering, and inspecting, continued for several minutes, till I supposed the nature of my questions had thoroughly concealed my identity. Finally I asked her—

"Have you got a Bible?"

Adjusting her spectacles to her eyes with both her hands, she replied—

"Ar'n't you priest *Spencer*? Those are the same eyes that used to look right through me. How *do* you do? I am glad to see you."

"I am no *priest*," said I.

"Well, we used to *call* ministers so when I was young. It is just like you to come and see me. But I didn't expect it."

I inquired whether she still kept her "Sixteen Short Sermons."

"O, yes," said she, "*that* is next to the Bible."

I told her that I should like to have that same book, and asked if she would be willing to give it to me.

"I would give you anything else I've got; but I should be unwilling to spare that, unless I could get another just like it. I read it over every little while."

She produced the same old tract which I had seen in her house more than seventeen years before. It bore the marks of age, and of much service. It had become almost illegible by use, and time, and dust. "It has been all around the neighbourhood," said she. "I have lent it to a great many folks; and sometimes I have had hard work to hunt it up, and get it back home again."

I gave her two new ones of the same sort, and also the whole bound volume which contains it; and after carefully examining the two, leaf by leaf, "to see if they were just like it," as she said, she finally consented to part with her old, time-worn, rusty tract. "I thought," said she, "I never should part with that book, but these new ones are better; I can read them easier, and I can lend them to more folks. Some people will read these, who would not read one so dirty and old as that."

I felt half guilty for taking her old companion, and was sorry I had ever asked for it. As I parted with her and came away, I noticed that her eyes kept fixed upon the "Sixteen Short Sermons," that I held in my hand. I hope yet to be permitted to return it to her.

There were two things in the character of this woman worthy of very special notice—her determination and her dependence. So firmly was she fixed in her resolution to abandon the habit, which had so long been her sin, and the cause of her misery, that after her first seriousness, on that memorable night, she never once tasted the cup of her shame. She would not see anybody else do it—she would not go where it was—she would cross the street to avoid passing the door where it was sold—she would not even *look* at it. And so entire was her dependence on God to keep her from it, that she gave the memorable description of her course—"*drink anything*? no! if I ever *think* of it I immediately go to prayer." I recommend her example to every reader of this book:—"drink anything? no! if you ever *think* of it, immediately go to prayer."

BESSIE A——N, AN INTENDED NUN.*

Various circumstances invest this little narrative with unusual interest. The naturally amiable character of the young lady herself—her early history and destination—her relationship to the celebrated Romish Bishop Doyle the escape which, in spite of all his arguments and personal influence, she made from the darkness and bondage of Rome, to the light and freedom of truth—her earnest life and early death—all combine to give a warm and attractive colouring to the portraiture of her which a friend has, in this little volume, presented.

The father of Bessie A——n was a Protestant, but her mother was a Romanist; and the former having died when she was three years old, the whole charge of her training (together with that of another daughter, Sarah, who was seven years older) devolved on the latter, who being, although a strong-minded woman, yet quite a devotee of Rome, resolved at once to prepare her for a convent life. Poor Bessie's training was, accordingly, of a somewhat severe kind. "From infancy she was accustomed to observe the fasts of the church most scrupulously. On ordinary fast-days, she only partook of one meal, which consisted of a few plain potatoes and salt; and, on special occasions, she was not allowed even that scanty meal till a late hour." Nor, child as she was, did she complain of this. Her mother so fired her imagination with thoughts of the honour of being "a bride of Christ," that she submitted joyfully to all such mortifications, and even longed for the time when she should enter the convent walls, looking upon than as the very gates of heaven.

"Mrs A—— possessed all that glow of imagination so remarkably characteristic of the Irish; and Bessie, being of an ardent disposition, listened to her eagerly when she rapturously dwelt on the happy destiny which was before her. How peculiarly she would be favoured of Heaven! In being shut out from the turmoil of the world, she would never feel the bitterness of disappointed hope, nor the uncertainty of the future; for, once within those hallowed walls, she would only leave them to enter a happier abode, and to receive the bridal crown reserved for the spouse of Christ. No cloud of sorrow would ever cross her path, but all would be quietness and peace.

"In this anticipation of happiness, vital religion had no part; for Mrs A—— had not found 'the pearl of great price' herself, and therefore could not present it to her child. She knew there was a Heaven and a Hell, but she knew not the work of Christ; she trusted to the priests to secure her entrance into heaven, and believing herself to be a member of the 'true Catholic Church,' thought she was quite certain of eternal happiness—I do not say eternal *life*; for she knew nothing of the new birth, of that life from above, which is alone eternal. She knew not that she was 'dead in trespasses and sins,' and consequently, that she needed the blood of Christ to wash away her guilt, and the Holy Ghost to quicken her soul. She felt not her need of a Saviour, and the peace she enjoyed was a false one; she saw salvation only through the ordinances of the Romish Church, and infused into Bessie's mind the highest respect and admiration for every thing connected with it."

At the age of ten years, she was confirmed by Dr. Doyle, Romish Bishop of Carlow, was admitted by him to frequent confession, and was in the fair way of becoming quite a trained devotee after the Romish fashion, when an event occurred, the circumstances of which gave a rough shock to her youthful faith, and eventually changed the whole current of her life. This was the death of her mother, who was seized by, and rapidly sunk under, consumption. The circumstances are thus told:—

"When Mrs A—— saw death approaching by rapid strides, the thought of eternity overwhelmed her. She sent for the priests and told them what agony of mind she endured at the prospect of appearing before God. They appointed various services of the church for her—directed her in her devotions—lent her books to read, and did every thing in their power to allay her mental sufferings. But it was all in vain, her misery increased; for it is only God who can give true peace of mind, and can say to the stormy billows, 'Peace, be still!' It is only acceptance through Christ that can satisfy a *truly* anxious soul: other things in time of health may give false confidence, but in the dying hour nought but Christ can satisfy. It is only when He is with us, that we can calmly enter the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and fear no evil.

"Priests and friends having failed in their utmost attempts to afford her any consolation, her daughter Sarah said to her, 'I remember, mamma, when papa was dying he used to call me often to the side of his bed, and tell me to read the Bible to him, when he was so ill that he could not read it himself, and though I was too young to understand what I read, yet I will remember the pleasure it gave him, and the bright joy that lighted up his face. So that I used at last to offer of my own accord to read to him, that I might see the happiness he enjoyed. Perhaps, if I were to read to you it might give you comfort.' Having obtained the permission of the priests, Sarah began reading the Word of God to her mother, who found it to

* "The Morning of Life: a Memoir of Miss A——s, who was educated for a Nun." Bath: Binns and Godwin.

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