

How Ian Maclaren's "Bonnie Brier Bush" Grew.

As was the case with Miss Harraden's "Ships that Pass in the Night," Ian Maclaren's "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush," which is attracting such attention now, was much less the result of premeditated purpose or the outcome of overmastering impulse than an accident precipitated by friendly coaxing and stimulus. This is according to his own confession. Mr. James Ashcroft Noble relates, in *The Bookman*, the details of an interview that he had with the author soon after the appearance of his very successful book. Mr. Noble first read the book as a professional critic, and it so affected him to both laughter and tears that he determined to see and talk with the writer of it.

Having discovered that Ian Maclaren was the Rev. John Watson, of the English Presbyterian Church, he visited his home, at Sefton Park, and found a man who did "not look literary," who was "tall, strongly built, with cleanly carved, decisive features, and the steady, alert eyes which testify to a firm will and a perfectly poised nervous organization"—"one of those born leaders and helpers to whom a man or woman in what is colloquially called 'a tight place' might go with a sure expectation of receiving aid, guidance, comprehension, sympathy." We quote from Mr. Noble's narrative:

"You must have been collecting and arranging your materials for some time, and looking forward to the publication of this or some similar book, at a suitable opportunity."

"No," replied Mr. Watson, "not even that. The existence of the book was entirely unpremeditated. It is as great a surprise to me as it is to any one; I can't even yet get over my wonder at it. Nothing could well be further from the lines of activity in which I had deliberately set myself to travel."

"Then how did it come about?"

"Ah, that's a very old story. You perhaps know that Dr. Robertson Nicoll and I have been acquaintances for some time, and I have contributed to his magazine, *The Expositor*, a number of articles on my own class of subjects. Well, Nicoll is a wonderful man; he sees what nobody else can see; he's just 'no canny.' I forget how long it is since he began to bother me to write some sketches of Scottish life—he knew I could do it—so he said—and I must do it for him. He kept on—talk, talk, talk—in that queer, quiet way of his, and I answered nothing, because there was nothing to say. Then he began to write letters, and finally to send telegrams, and then I said, 'This is growing serious; I must put a stop to it. And, you see, there was only one way of putting a stop to it; so I just followed the example of the unjust judge in the parable, and I sat down there and then wrote a story which I sent off to him. I have every reason to believe that it was a very poor story, but it was all the better on that account, for it seemed that I could only convince him of my penury by exhibiting my rags. But oh, that man! As I said just now, he really is 'no canny.' I got the manuscript back, and with it a letter. I wish I had kept that letter; I should have liked to show it to you. But it ran something like this: 'I shall not print this story. It is not what I want, and not what I know that you can do. Write something else in your true vein, and send it to me soon.' You see Nicoll didn't know when he was beaten, but I knew when I was beaten. There was nothing for it but to give in, so I thought of some types of character which I had known in my Scottish parishes when I was a young minister fifteen years or more ago, and I selected one or two of them, and wrote 'Domsie,' which you remember is the first sketch in the 'Brier Bush.' And, by the way, there is just one point which I should like to mention now. Some people seem curious about the 'originals' of this and that character in the stories. If the book continues to interest people I should like it to be known that there are no originals—that there is not a single portrait in the volume; the people are simply individualizations of types that are familiar to every minister—or, for the matter of that, to every layman—in any Highland or semi-Highland parish. But I was telling you about 'Domsie.' This time I didn't receive the manuscript back again. I simply got a letter from Dr. Nicoll, the purport of which was that 'Domsie' had affected him much in the same manner that you were kind enough to say it had affected you. It was just what he wanted, and should appear in an early number of *The British Weekly*. Then he wanted more, and somehow the other stories came into shape, till finally the book was published. And there it is; but, as I have said, it is a surprise to me still."

"Well," I said, "I think that is one of the most curious histories of an imaginative work that I ever heard. The story most like it is that of how George Eliot was induced by G. H. Lewes to try her hand at fiction; but it is clear that when the idea was suggested to her she took to it much more readily and kindly than you did. The ordinary notion of imaginative creation is that it is the outcome of an irresistible impulse."

"It wasn't so in my case. I was not conscious of any power in that direction; and even now that the book is published, and you and other kind critics have said, all sorts of pleasant things about it, I feel as doubtful about myself as ever."—(Sel.)

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Prayer Meeting Topic for January.

C. E. Topic.—How to pray, Luke 11:1-13. (A meeting of preparation for the week of prayer).

B. Y. P. U. Topic.—Self-restraint for others, 1 Cor. 8:9-13.

B. Y. P. U. Daily Bible Readings.

(Baptist Union.)

Monday, January 3.—1 Cor. 12. Many gifts, the same spirit, (vs. 4). Compare 1 Peter 4:10.

Tuesday, January 4.—1 Cor. 13. The greatest gift in human nature, (vs. 13). Compare Rom. 5:8.

Wednesday, January 5.—1 Cor. 14:1-20. Gifted with maturity in understanding, (vs. 20). Compare Eph 4:14, 15.

Thursday, January 6.—1 Cor. 14:21-40. Gift of exercising gifts with common sense, (vs. 40). Compare Eph. 4:11, 12.

Friday, January 7.—1 Cor. 15:1-29. The gift of grace within us, (vs. 10). Compare 2 Cor. 3:5.

Saturday, January 8.—1 Cor. 15:30-58. The gift of the resurrection, (vs. 53). Compare Phil 3:21.

B. Y. P. U. Prayer Meeting Topic—January 2.

Self-restraint for others, 1 Cor. 8:9-13.

This chapter contains Paul's answer to the question of the Corinthians concerning meats offered to idols. The central thought of the apostle's advice is our topic, viz., Self-restraint for others. That is, the holding of one's self back from motion in any manner; putting a curb on any action, physical, moral or mental, for the sake of others, especially for the sake of those for whom Christ died; those who are weak in the faith; those who have but a confused knowledge of the greatest and plainest truths. We should, therefore, be careful to do nothing that would cause weak Christians to defile their consciences or stumble. Though we might have liberty, we must be cautious how we use that liberty lest it should prove a stumbling block to the weak, see vs. 10-12. We are to deny ourselves, even of what is lawful, that the souls of others be not endangered. Those for whom Christ shed His most precious blood should be dear to us. If He had such compassion as to die for them, we should have compassion enough to deny ourselves for their sake and not use our liberty to their hurt, to their ruin. It is worthy of note that injuries done to Christians are injuries done to Christ, for, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Shall we then be void of compassion for them to whom Christ has shown so much?

The apostle enforces all with his own example, v. 13. He does not say he would never eat more. This would be to destroy himself, which would be a great sin. But for the sake of his weak brother he would eat no more flesh, if the eating of it would cause that brother to offend. Liberty is valuable, but the weakness of a brother for whom Christ died, should induce, and sometimes bind us to waive it. Paul declares, that rather than thus "cause his weak brother to offend," or thus displease his gracious Lord, he would touch no more flesh to the end of his life. And, indeed, considering the inveterate habits of such as had been brought up, or perhaps grown old in idolatry, and also the corrupt state of the Corinthian church, it is not unlikely that some professed Christians retained a hankering after their former usages, especially as feasting with their neighbors and relatives on such occasions, would in part save them from reproach and persecution. The apostle, however, by "a weak brother," seems particularly to mean a man with a doubting conscience; not him with an erroneous one, at least, not exclusively. W. J. HALSE.

Said of the C. C. C.

"My knowledge of the Scriptures has been greatly increased by the pursuit of these courses, therefore I can do better service for the Master." Mattie Carter, Bloomington, Ind.

"These studies have been of incalculable value to me; in fact I owe much of my knowledge of Baptist doctrine to the prosecution of these courses during the last four years, and my interest in mission work has been greatly intensified by them. I am looking forward with pleasure to the lessons of the coming year." M. Lizzie Harvey, Lynchburg, Va.

"It gives me great pleasure to say that I cannot drop the Christian Culture Courses. I have been a teacher for five years and am now engaged in a good deal of mental work; but these studies are essential to my Christian life." Eliza H. Butler, Bangor, Maine.

"The Christian Culture Courses were a great help to me when I studied them, and I expect to take them up again this year." Amy G. Mason, Santiam, Ore.

The Young People

"I have always taken a great interest in the Christian Culture Courses and greatly enjoy the examinations. I would not miss this my last year, as I want to complete my diploma. I think the lessons are excellent and very profitable." J. H. Tawney, McKeesport, Pa.—Union.

Putting Life into a Society.

CALEB COBWEB ANSWERS A QUESTION OFTEN ASKED.

"Hello, Professor Cobweb! Is that you, Professor? Well, won't you please tell us how to put life into our society? Some way, it seems to me sort o' dead."

Once in a while this is the appalling query squeaked at me through the telephone.

Appalling, not because it is a query hard to answer, for the answer is very easy; but because it shows so vast an ignorance of the fundamental principles of Christian life and service. May I not briefly review those principles, and thus answer this frequently asked question?

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

There is no other life.

Wherever there is felt to be a lack of life, therefore, let men look to see wherein they lack Christ.

If your society is dead or dying, it is because there is no Christ in it, or not enough Christ.

"But that is a mystical saying," you reply. "What do you mean by getting Christ into our societies? How can it be done in actual practice?"

The answer again is to be found in the Bible.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

The Life will be in the midst of you, spreading, growing, fructifying, as life cannot help doing, if two or three of you meet together in His name. One is not enough. One cannot make a society of Christian Endeavor. But if there are two of you that meet in His name, your meeting will have life, and have it continually more abundantly.

"But you are still mystical. What is it to meet in His name?" you ask.

Well, it is not merely that two or three that have taken upon themselves the designation of "Christian" meet together. "In my name" is explained by the parallel phrase, "For my sake." If you come together because you love Christ, because he wishes you to and therefore you wish to, then you come together in his name. Not because it is your duty to come, not because it is "the thing" to come, not because others expect you to come, not because you will be praised for coming or uneasy if you do not come; but because you love Christ, and want to do his will. That is coming together in his name.

If in this way only two of you come together in your Christian Endeavor meeting, it will not be long before three of you will come together thus; and then six, and twelve, and all of you. Then your society will be alive to its very finger-tips.

You do not need more methods, or more members, or more machinery. You need more love of Christ.—Golden Rule.

Unwisdom of Wrong Doing.

Wickedness is never wise. There is fact at the base of the old saying, "The Devil always leaves a pair or bars down." That is, he who is doing wickedly is sure to make some fatal mistake. Only truth is always consistent with itself, needing neither watching nor planning to make its successive statements agree. Whoever starts off with a lie is sure to need fresh lies all along the track, in order to keep up the semblance of truth. And there is no truer synonym of wrong and wickedness than a lie. When a man is in the habit of speaking and doing crookedly, he finds it hard to keep along a straight line, even when he wants to. All the forces of the universe work in the direction of the right; and whoever determinedly goes wrong must breast all those forces. Doing right is simplest, safest, wisest. Doing wrong gets one into bad habits, gives one a bad name, and sends one blundering along on the road to ruin.—S. S. Times.

Mistaking the Lights.

Many a ship has been wrecked by the mistaking of one light for another. There have not been wanting instances in which vessels have been lured to destruction on dangerous shores, or fatal rocks, by false lights which wreckers have kindled to deceive. In other cases, the beacon which shone across the waves to warn of danger has been mistaken for one that beckoned to a safe harbor. In the voyage of life similar casualties occur. There are men still who, like the cruel wreckers of old on rock-bound coasts, kindle false lights to lure men to death. There is danger, too, of our being deceived by appearances, where there is no intent to destroy. Erroneous teaching confronts us at every turn. We need to discriminate carefully between things that differ.—Baptist Union.

Sermon Committee.

The sermon committee is making way gradually, but still the vast majority of our societies are without this great help to the pastor and the church. "The young people help me to sermonize," says one pastor reported in *The Watchword*. "I had a sermon committee in the society which reported my sermons. They reported some things I didn't say, but made them think. And that made me think of some things to say."—Golden Rule.