

SAUL OF TARSUS

By Rev. W. Hamilton

The history of Saul of Tarsus has often been cited with happy success in confirmation of Christianity.

His accession to the Christian side derives much of its singularity from his hostility—hostility neither ordinary nor in the least degree controlled. It could only, at any time, have been exasperated into fiercer fury by the suggestion that he should soon be won to the number of the proselytes, and defenders already enlisted. Had augur or soothsayer hazarded the prediction, no improbabilities could have occurred to the hearer more blind and excessive.

If any name sounded dreadful in the ear of the first Christian, it was that of "the young man who kept the raiment of the first martyr, Stephen." That name was a brand of cruelty, it was a voice of blood. It passed forth as an omen, as when nations have beheld the meteor-sword flashing above them. In vain do we search for any redeeming virtue, any exculpating circumstance, in his character and history. The ordinary palliatives of youth, temperament, inexperience, supply the actual aggravation. A rank maturity of evil contrasts itself to his youth, a phlegmatic steadiness of malignity does violence to his temperament, and an inventive redundancy of aggressions more than makes up for the disadvantages of inexperience. He settles into a cool and gloating ferocity, he revolves new and more dire schemes of persecution. He can revel in the carnage of a promiscuous massacre with an unshrinking eye and unrelenting heart. He never seems warmed by a generous enthusiasm. There is none of that fine sentiment, that moral poetry, which sometimes has retrieved the sallies of an extravagant zeal. His acquittal of dishonesty is the condemnation of his cruelty.

And if any conversion appeared placed beyond the limit of hope and all reasonable expectation, if any could be termed "too hard for God," or lying within those moral impossibilities which he allows because they establish his perfection of nature and rule of will, who would have wavered to pronounce that it was this? Sooner might it "have been surmised that Caiphas would have looked on him whom he had pierced, and, in bitter compunction, would have rent his ephod, and cast his tiara into the dust. Sooner might it have been anticipated that Pilate would have worshipped that king whom neither the zeal, nor cohort, nor death itself, could imprison in the tomb. And even when the thousands of the populace, which had insulted him in every form, spit on him in the hall, and jested with him on the cross, are "pricked to the heart," it does not impress us as so strange, nor does its announcements strike us as so unlikely, as that this stern foe should pause, that this fell monster should soften.

His earliest prepossessions would render the contingency of such an event most minute and distant. The blood of his high ancestry would rebel against the change. His education at the feet of a Rabbi would confirm his attachment to "the Jew's religion," would enable him to defend it with adroitness. His sect, as a Pharisee, would induce the pride of a more strictly ceremonial consistency. Bigotry would call in public favour to its aid, for he was esteemed the champion of his nation and his faith, of his country and his God.

Persecution could not find a more ready instrument. He enters into its service with an unparalleled quickness and force of congeniality. He is formed to it at once. He puts forth all its perfect instincts and fangs. Who does not tremble as he proceeds? "Damascus is waxed feeble and turneth herself to flee." The terror, scourge, and spoiler of the church—the pestilence withering all into a desert—the conflagration "setting on fire the course of nature, and itself act on fire of hell"—the star of disastrous influence, which falling to the earth, converts its waters into gall and blood—to what can he be compared? How long shall he be suffered to make havoc of the saints? Will not "God avenge his own elect?" "Are not his eyes upon the truth?" Where sleeps his thunder? "Judgment slumbereth not." The rebel falls: amidst his most intoxicating dream, his most applauded career—in

"the greatness of his way"—he falls! Jesus of Nazareth has struck down his foe. Well has the bolt sped, true has the arrow flown! But that light streams not to blast, that voice upbraids not to condemn, that power smites not to destroy. Oh, what a change has moved over his heart! What "a new creature!" He weeps. He abhors himself. "Behold he prayeth." The hands which "haled men and women to prison," which a few hours ago received the fatal commission, and until this moment grasps the murderous weapon, are now penitently clasped, and suppliantly uplifted! The knees which shook not when he was surrounded by the wailings of mothers and children, whom he made widows and orphans, now pliant as the infant sinew, are bent in transfixing prayer! The eyes, no longer bent in moody scorn, or shooting with wrathful glance, now overflow with tears! The lips which breathed out threatenings and slaughter, now utter the cry of shame and surrender. "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" What a conquest! What a spectacle! So sudden, so enduring! "Where is the fury of the oppressor?" It is a trophy of grace. It is a marvel of Omnipotence. "The lamb may lie down with the lion, the sucking child may play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child may put his hand on the cockatrice's den."

MUSIC OF NATURE.—Oh! there is harmony in nature, inconceivably attuned to one glad purpose! every thing in the universe has a voice, with which it joins in the tribute of thanksgiving. The whispers of the wind playing with the summer foliage, and its fitful wooings through the autumnal branches; the broken murmur of the stream the louder gushings of the waterfall, and the wild roar of the cataract, all speak the praises of God to our hearts. Who can sit by the sea-side when every wave lies hushed in adoration or falls upon the shore in subdued and awful cadence, without drinking in unutterable thoughts of the majesty of God? The loud hosannas of Ocean in the storm, and the praises of God on the whirlwind, awaken us to the same lesson; and every peal of thunder is an hallelujah to the Lord of Hosts!

Oh! there is a harmony in nature! The voice of every creature tells us of the goodness of God. It comes to us in the song of the birds, the deep delicious tones in which the wood-dove breathes out its happiness; the gracefully melting descant of the nightingale; the joyous, thrilling melody of the lark; the thrush's wild warbling, and the blackbird's tender whistle; the soft piping of the bulfinch, and the gay carol of the wren; the sprightly call of the goldfinch, and the gentle twittering of the swallow; even now, when every other bird is silent, little robin is pouring out his sweetest of all sweet notes upon yonder rosebush; and so distinctly does he thank God, who made the leaves to grow for him on the hawthorn, and mountain-ash, and who has put it into the heart of man to love him, and strew crumbs for him when the berries fail, that my soul, too often insensible to its own mercies, is warmed into gratitude for him. The very insect tribe have entered into a covenant, that God shall, at no season of the year, be without a witness amongst them to his praises—for when the hum of the bees and chirping of the grasshopper have ceased to enliven us, and the gnat has laid by his horn, then the little cricket wakens into life and song, and gladdens our hearth with the same story till the winter is past; and so all nature praises God and is never weary.

MOTION A PROOF OF DEITY.—There cannot be a clearer proof of a Deity, than the existence of motion. This evidently appears not to be essential to matter, because we see a very great portion of the material universe without it. Not being, therefore, an original state of matter, but merely an incident, it must be an effect. But since matter, not being intelligent, cannot be the cause of its own motion—and yet we cannot conceive of any atom beginning to move without a cause—that cause must be found out of itself. Whatever may be the nearest cause or the number of secondary causes; though innumerable portions of matter may be reciprocally moved; though the series of links in the chain through which motion is propagated may be indefinitely multiplied; we must, in order

to arrive at the origin of these various phenomena, ascend to mind, terminate our inquiries in spirit; nor can we account for the beginning, much less for the continuance and extension of motion, unless we trace it to the will of that Being who is the Cause of all causes, the great Original Mover of the universe. Power is, therefore the attribute of mind; instrumentality that of body. When we read in the Old Testament of the most exalted achievements ascribed to angelic spirits, we cannot suppose that it is owing to any gross materialism which they possess; on the contrary, they have no bodies capable of being investigated by our senses; and, in proportion as they are more attenuated, do they possess greater power. We have reason to believe that all finite minds are under the direction of the Supreme Power, who—without destroying their accountability, or interfering with their free agency—makes all their operations subservient to the accomplishment of his counsels. Hence, all opposition to the Deity is beautifully represented by Isaiah as if the instrument should rebel against him that wields it—as if "The rod should shake itself against him that lifts it up or, 'the staff should lift up itself against him that is no wood.'" (Isaiah x. 15. Bishop Lowth's translation.) All created beings, in this respect, are but instruments in the hands of the Deity whose will is sovereign over them.

The Divine Being, as the Great Father of spirits, combines within himself all the separate energies found in the universe. He is the source, origin, and fountain of all power diffused through creation. The very minds which he has formed are kept in mysterious subordination, and can never overstep the bounds he has assigned them. "Once have I heard this, that power belongs unto God."
—R. Hall

WEDDED LIFE.—I love to get unobserved into a corner, and watch the bride in her white attire, and with her smiling face and her soft eyes moving before me in their pride of life, weave a waking dream of her future happiness, and persuade myself that it will be true. I think how they will sit upon the luxuriant sofa as the twilight falls, and build gay hopes, and murmur in low tones the now unforbidden tenderness, and how thrillingly the allowed kiss and the beautiful endearments of wedded life will make even the parting joyous, and how gladly they will come back from the crowd and empty mirth of the gay, to each others quiet company. I picture to myself that young creature who blushes even now, at his hesitating caress, listening eager for his footsteps, as the night steals on and wishing that he would come; and when he enters at last, with an affection undying as his pulse, and folds her to his bosom, I can feel the very tide that goes flowing through his heart, and gaze with him on her graceful form as she moves about him for the kind offices of affection, soothing all his unquiet cares and making him forget even himself, in her young and unshadowed beauty. I go forward for years; and see her luxuriant hair put soberly away from her brow, and her girlish graces ripened into dignity, and her bright loveliness chastened with the gentle meekness of maternal affection. Her husband looks on her with a proud eye, and shows the same fervent love and delicate attention which first won her; and fair children are growing up about them: and they go on full of honor and untroubled years, and are remembered when they die!—*Willis.*

THE LONELY COTTAGER.—A pious cottager, residing in the centre of a long and dreary heath, being asked by a Christian visitor, "are you not sometimes afraid in your lonely situation, especially in winter?" replied, "O no, sir, for Faith shuts the door at night, and Mercy opens it in the morning."

A taste for natural beauty, when cultivated, refines and softens, dignifies and exalts the affections, and leads the soul to the admiration and love of that Being, who is the author of all that is fair, sublime, good and excellent, in the vast circle of creation.

Actuated by this divine inspiration, the universe becomes a temple—every surrounding object an altar—every pulse worship, and every breath praise.