

Choice Literature.

BOB AND HIS TEACHERS.

A GLASGOW STORY.

BY REV. DUNCAN MORRISON, D.D., OWEN SOUND.

CHAPTER XVI.

BOB'S CONSCIENTIOUSNESS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT—
TRAINING IN THIS LINE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO
FORM A STRONG CHRISTIAN.

It is said of Dr. Chalmers that on a day preparatory to his communion which he had reserved for conversing with those intending to join the Church, and ascertaining their fitness for such a solemn step, that he found one woman singularly ignorant, as he supposed, in the great essentials of the faith. He asked the question:—

"What is faith?" No answer.

"What is justification?" No answer.

"What is adoption?" No answer.

At length he advised her not to be discouraged, but to study well the Shorter Catechism, and to be sure and come to him again at the next communion season. She retired, but, reaching the front entrance, she stood with the door in her hand, and said to him: "I cannot speak for Christ, but I could die for Him." Whereupon the good man said: "Don't go away." And upon further conversation was so pleased with her upon the whole that he made her welcome.

That was a very grand testimony; but alongside of it we would place another of a very humble kind, and yet one not to be despised. It is the case of a young woman who made a similar application to join Mr. Spurgeon's Church in London:—

Spurgeon: "Are you converted?"

Answer: "Yes."

Spurgeon: "How do you know?"

Answer: "I sweep the corners of the rooms now. I used to skip the corners. I put conscience into my work."

Spurgeon: "Is that all?"

Answer: "My life now is not what it used to be."

Spurgeon: "Tell me in what respect."

Answer: "I used to take advantage of my mistress, cheat her, tell her lies and tell stories about her."

Spurgeon: "What put it into your head to be so careful about sweeping the corners and other little things?"

Answer: "Oh, it was one day you were preaching about the unjust steward. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much, and he that is unjust in that which is least is unjust also in much." That was the text, and the more I thought of it the more I felt its power, and the more I thought of Christ the more I saw that He was the very Saviour I needed, and now I desire to take sides with Him, and be one of that great flock which He is leading to the promised land."

Here we have a very humble testimony given in behalf of Christ; and yet it is a testimony I would be disposed to estimate at a higher rate than the other who professed at that moment to have the courage of a martyr. This young woman said she put conscience into her work. In other words, she carried her religion into all the details of her daily life like the Levites of old in their temple service. All their work was sacred work—hewing wood, drawing water, sweeping floors, cleaning lamps—all holy, because done for holy ends. It is thus that when Christian principle is brought to bear upon life it glorifies work and makes even drudgery divine. He that often made long journeys on foot, that washed the disciples' feet and made His own breakfast on the Galilean shore, sees nothing vile—nothing mean or menial in such humble services as those referred to by this young woman. Her life was sacred whether it was work or worship that filled up her time. Like the red thread that runs through the centre of all the cordage of the British navy, whether it be the heavy mooring cable or the light line used for lashing purposes—like this red line is Christian life, ennobling it all and redeeming it from everything that may be called servile or unclean. The young woman said she put conscience in her work. Here was the moral discipline she needed. Here was the training of conscience she needed—a training in things agreeable and in things disagreeable—things at war with her feelings of ease, comfort, convenience. Always to speak the truth is often a hard duty, involving no small degree of self-denial and sometimes self-mortification, but this is the kind of training that goes to form the highest type of manhood. Train a child only in the line of things agreeable and you are training to rottenness. Train in both directions—the agreeable and the disagreeable—and he will put on strength.

This was the kind of training that Bob had been receiving for years—unconsciously, perhaps, but still receiving it. Hence his conscientiousness—not a conscientiousness that grew up spontaneously from a natural soil—but a conscientiousness that was inspired and sanctioned by that good Spirit that leads into all truth and diveth unto every man severally as he will. In his conversations with his mother in the management of their little affairs there was often a reference to the great Unseen, and there was always an underlying faith which spoke of a recompense of reward and at the same time of their responsibilities. It is in this way that the conscience is trained—that spirituality is developed and the whole man built up in the faith. It is in this way he becomes strong in God, fruitful in the Spirit, generous and unselfish, pure in heart, patient in tribulation, abounding in whatever things are honest and lovely and of good report. More and more we are learning that unless our religion has not only an intellectual basis, but a strong conscientiousness, it will be worthless in the day of trial. More and more we are learning the fact that a mere appeal to the feelings, however successful, is not to be trusted. The splendid bridge that spanned the river Forth, for the building of which the architect was knighted, broke down one stormy night in the fall of 1879, when a heavy train of railway carriages was passing over. Why? The foundations were insufficient, the materials were rotten and the whole structure was loosely put together, though the contractors had got their money and the architect his honours. It did very well

for some years—very well while summer suns and peaceful skies lasted, but on that fearful night it was weak, and when the heavy train came dashing on, it went crashing down and all that was upon it. So with character imperfectly built, loosely put together, made up of rotten materials. There are men and women that enter the Church on the wave of a revival that run well for a season—do well enough so long as they are not crossed, and declare, it may be, that they are ready to die for Christ, but when a great strain is brought to bear upon them—a great strain of the powers of darkness—they fall, and great is the fall thereof.

In these days when spiritual life is running low in many of our Churches, and when the Church as a whole is failing to exercise the power it should in the land—in our legislative halls, our councils and educational halls, our mercantile railway and science halls, it behooves us to consider such things and see whether something may not be done to raise the moral tone of the country. One thing we may be sure of: it will not be done by banishing the Bible from the common school or silencing everything like a reference to God.

The simple question of truth, of equity between man and man, the question of righteousness in all the affairs of life points to the fact that men need training in conscience a great deal more than they need spirituality in affection. They need both, but far more they need the one than the other. What is wanted is not simply that a man be conscientious in things agreeable to his mind, but in matters involving much self-denial and inconvenience. Train a youth, I repeat, to be conscientious only in things agreeable to his taste, and never on the line of self-denial, and you train him up for rottenness. He will never be able to bear any strain. He will be weak in the hour of temptation. He may pass through a dozen of revivals and rise again and again to an ecstatic enjoyment under the afflatus of a glorious hymn and the personal testimonies of this friend and that borne to God's great work in their souls, but still his foundations are in the dust, and he will not be able to trust himself, or at least his employers, in circumstances of danger.

There are certain great foundation truths that enter into a healthy piety that should never be lost sight of by the ministers of religion—and the teachers of youth both in Sunday schools and the public schools of the country—certain virtues which enter into the stability of nations as well as individuals, and which are common to all ages. I refer to such virtues as honour, truth, justice, purity, fidelity, frugality, industry, the opposites of which are laziness, intemperance, uncleanness, greed, gluttony, the lust of the eye and the pride of life. No man can afford to neglect the cultivation of these virtues that I have named in the hope that a revival preacher will come some day and lift him up above the power of temptation. No nation can be strong that makes light of such virtues, for all history proclaims the opposite. Nations don't fall because a mighty foe has come to their gates with battering rams and engines of war in greater force than they; but because their foundations are rotten and their citizens have lost their manhood. It is thus they fall and become an easy prey to the invader. So with the individual. He requires to look well to his foundations. He needs to be lifted up by the wave of a grand revival, but he needs no less a training in conscience. He needs both an intellectual basis and a conscientious basis on which to build, otherwise the superstructure will be anything but satisfactory. Yet in all our revivals, in all the enginery of the Church, Sunday schools, prayer meetings, festivals, library books and prettily-illustrated papers in the Sunday school, it is the emotional nature that is chiefly contemplated, addressed, and addressed on the supposition that spirituality carries with it morality—a supposition that is not always justified by facts. Oh the sad memories of some of those revivals I have witnessed! Oh the stench that comes from their history! Oh the inconsistencies, the wrecks and shames that have followed in their train! Who does not know that many that made grand professions in a glorious hour of spiritual exaltation have gone down in darkness? I tell you that men that have had no training in the line of conscience are not to be trusted in a storm. They cannot stand a heavy strain. They have no proper bottom on which to steady themselves.

It is all very well, as Joseph Cook says, to throw the inkstand at the devil, as Luther did, but the devil is not overcome in that way. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" is as true to-day as ever it was. But no man can resist the devil unless he begin early—unless he has trained himself to say no to wrong doing in all its forms. He that says no lightly will have the devil courting him all the time until he wins. Quit yourselves like men is the trumpet sound of the Gospel and of common sense as well.

CHAPTER XVII.

DAVID BROWN, THE FOSTER FATHER OF MABEL—HIS
SCPTICISM—CHRISTIANITY AND THE RELIGIONS OF
THE EAST.

David Hume, the great English sceptic, whose writings have, perhaps, given more trouble to theologians than any other I could name, in spending a few days in the house of a Christian friend, was very much impressed with the piety of the family—the reverence of their devotions, the tenderness of their affections for one another, their happiness and the high moral tone that marked their whole intercourse; and so one morning at the close of family prayers, he whispered to his host: "Oh that I had never doubted."

Now David Brown, the foster-father of Mabel, had adopted the views of this great sceptic. He, like Hume, looked on everything evangelical as superstition, and spoke of it as a form of one of the religions of the world, putting it on a level with Brahminism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism, etc. He, that is David Brown, had evidently given much thought to the subject, and he was ready at any time for a controversy. This I had avoided as much as possible, but one day I was compelled to hear him and make such defences as I could in behalf of Christianity; that is, its supernatural character, for he did not object to it as a historical power in common with the other natural religions referred to. He said:—

"You are a sincere man, and I respect you, but you are a deluded man. Still I believe that Christianity is a good thing and that it has done you good."

"Yes," said I, "and it would do you good if you would only let it, and is doing you good whether you believe in it or no, accept of it or no."

"How?" he said.

"On the principle," I replied "that the tree outside of the garden wall gets the benefit of the garden culture inside of the wall—drainage, manure, etc. Don't you think that Christianity has created a warmer, truer public sentiment—a purer atmosphere in every land in which it has found a place, and benefited, and that to a large extent, even those that stood aloof from its claims?"

"Mention a case," he replied.

Well, take the case of war. Think of the *Alabama* trouble. Think of ten men representing the countries interested, sitting down quietly in an upper room in Geneva in a business way taking up the various points raised, disposing of them one by one, looking at the whole matter not only in the light of international comity and law, but in the light of common sense and Christian principle and coming to a peaceful solution. That trouble was got over not by the nations interested taking to their guns, but by these ten men taking to their pens and peacefully affixing their signatures to a document binding England to pay in damages three million of pounds sterling. The money was paid forthwith and not an angry word was exchanged. That's the way battles are fought now, not with swords but pens. Kings cannot afford to take the field now as in former days. They cannot afford to brave public opinion in making an onset on a peaceful nation, for the penalty of the offender in such a case would be ostracism. The nation that will not fear God will fear the boycott. Now what is public opinion but the public sentiment purified by Christianity?

"But," said he, "what do you regard as the origin of this improved public sentiment—this warmer atmosphere of which you speak?"

"The origin? Christ is the origin. He is the Sun of Righteousness to which we are indebted for the warmer and the purer atmosphere. He reigns, and He reigns in the interest of righteousness. The mightiest power in the world to-day is not that of the Armstrong gun, or the millions of wealth that a syndicate can bring into the market. Christianity is the great power towards which all forces are bending, and woe be to him that would stand in its way. Let the potsherd of the earth strive with the potsherd of the earth, but woe to him that striveth with his Maker."

Brown: "Yet it is all founded on a myth—a fancy. I don't mean to say that there never was such a man as Christ Jesus of Nazareth. I think there was a good man of that name lived some nineteen hundred years ago; but I don't believe in the miracles that have been ascribed to Him, such as His walking upon the sea, feeding thousands with nothing at His command but two loaves and a few fishes, etc. I look upon all such as exaggerations, if not fables. The Bible, you are to remember, is an oriental book, and deals largely in the figurative. How easy for Mary Magdalene, who was early at the sepulchre, to be deceived in the mist of the early dawn as to the identity of Christ; and how ready in the excitement of events that had just taken place and in her expectant mood to spread the story among brethren similarly moved? Yes, and how ready for the story to swell every day—to take a deeper root every day in the minds of His followers like a snowball rolling on, gathering bulk and strength as it comes down through the ages!"

"Then, you believe that Christianity is founded on a myth?"

Brown: "To a large extent I do."

"What, then, about the testimony of so many witnesses in Christ's day—of the fact that He showed Himself alive after His passion to His disciples, being seen of them forty days after, and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom? We read that on one occasion He was seen of five hundred brethren at once. Are we to suppose that all those were deceived and that all that had to do with them were also deceived, and that all the scholars that have sat in judgment on the question for nineteen hundred years—men capable of weighing evidence, detecting a flaw, familiar with the facts of contemporaneous history—that they were all deceived?"

Brown: "You state your argument well, but I can never get over David Hume's position in the matter of the testimony of the disciples."

"What was that?"

Brown: "The forces of nature are uniform. With them there is no variableness—no shadow of turning. We have experience of tradition being at fault, but we have no experience of the laws of nature, or forms of nature being at fault, or even changing; and so we conclude that it is more likely that Christ's disciples were mistaken in their testimony than that any change or interruption took place in order to witness for Christ."

"Then your position is that Christianity is a myth, or to a great extent so? But did you ever know of a myth working such wonders, converting such numbers, in short, exercising such an uplifting power, and that for so many ages of Christianity?"

Brown: "Yes, Brahminism is a myth, and for many ages has been the great power that has ruled the millions of India. And though it is known to Europeans only in its degraded form—its polytheistic form (having gods many and lords many), it was not so originally. Those that have studied the Vedic hymns, as old as the days of Abraham, find that the various divinities mentioned in them all run into one another, and are in reality the names of the one living and true God."

"Well, that is certainly something like a parallel case—the only one, perhaps, but how poor the fruit. What a contrast to the brilliant career of Christianity?"

(To be continued.)

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