

climbed to hope. Had he known of Nest's marriage with Acca's son, it would have added another rung to the ladder. Hope, as is well known, was the last tenant left in Pandora's box; and Edric could not have given up hoping had he tried.

But to-day he was more despondent than before. Time had gone rolling on, until both Penmaenawr and Canterbury might have been reached, and a messenger have returned from either. But no change came. Could no one do anything? It was hard to die causelessly at twenty-nine! Could God do nothing? whispered temptation always ready to slip in when a crevice is left open. Or was it that he would not? Or, yet further, was the fact one step more dreadful—was there no God, either to will or do?

The gaoler was in the habit of entering the dungeon only once a day. He had already paid his visit, and had brought the prisoner fare—a meagre allowance of ale and bread. The prisoner paused in his walk, and spoke aloud in his sore trouble.

"Oh God, is there no help?" he said. "Or is there no God? It is hard, hard to die just now."

"Would it be easier fifty years hence, young man?" demanded an unexpected voice out of the darkness.

Edric turned rapidly, and faced the direction whence the voice had come.

"Who art thou?" he said nervously, "and how earnest thou here?"

"I am none for whom thou carest," said the voice.

"Come forth and show thyself," said Edric, authoritatively.

The voice answered by revealing itself in human shape. Edric could scarcely see, but he made out that his visitor was an old man, and he caught metallic gleams of gold or silver about his dress, denoting that he was of noble blood.

"Art thou a messenger from the King?"

"Aye—a messenger from the King?"

"Is it for life or death?"

"Ethelfrid offers to give thy life for another. But there are conditions."

Edric shook his head sadly.

"How could I take another's life?" he said. "How so? Let me hear the conditions."

"He that shall die for thee shall be neither brother nor woman. He shall be thine equal in blood. And he shall give himself voluntarily."

"He might as well have imposed none!" said Edric contemptuously. "It were better to refuse bread to a beggar than to tell him to climb up to the moon and he shall find it."

"They are hard conditions to be done," was the calm reply.

"They are impossible!" answered Edric. "Nay, young man," said the messenger gravely. "Impossible is not a word for men's lips. Who can say that anything is impossible but God?"

Edric made no answer. Here he commenced his restless walk, and in its second turn stopped suddenly before his visitor.

"What is thy name, friend?"

"Am I thy friend?" was the ambiguous response.

"Art thou my enemy?" said Edric.

"I am thine enemy," answered the stranger, "and thy father's, and thy father's father's."

"Then why earnest thou here?—was it to mock my misery?"

"Thou wilt know why, to-morrow. But I am Imogen's friend."

"Imogen—my wife! Hast thou seen her?" cried Edric, eagerly.

"How much dost thou love her?" demanded the strange visitor.

"Nay, how can I measure love?"

"Dost thou hold her dearer than life?"

"Aye, a thousandfold!"

"And dearer than honor?"

Edric hesitated and reddened.

"It is well," said the old man. "There is but One who should hold that place. Yet the time may come, Thane, when thou shalt be constrained to choose between God and honor."

It was strange language which he spoke, and Edric only half understood him.

"It is hard work to die!" he said, turning away with a sigh, which, though he strove to smother it, came from the very depths of his heart.

"True, young man," said the stranger quietly.

"If I had been called to a warrior's death—if I had died with my hand on the spear at the moment of victory—that would have been brave and noble, and easy to be borne. But to die a dog's death—nay, a captive's,

criminal's, a death of disgrace in the eyes of men—it is too much to bear! It is too much!"

"There was a death once," said the old man slowly, "which was a death of disgrace in the eyes of men, and yet it was the noblest death that ever man died."

"There was?" said Edric. "What was the man's name?"

"It was—Jesus Christ."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edric, reverently bowing his head.

"And I should never have known it—nor Him—if Imogen had not told me."

"Imogen told thee?"

"She told me. For more than seventy years I had turned my back upon Him. Colin of Y sought to tell me, and I cursed him. Thane of Bangor would have told me, and I chased him away with my spear. It is true they began wrong, they talked about me, and they should have spoken of Him. But Maur, her father, would have told me, and I silenced even him. Christ Himself would have come and dwelt with me, and I barred the door in his face."

"And at last a girl told me—this girl, whom I loved, because she reminded me of my dead child. I could not lift weapon to her—I could not curse her. It would have seemed like cursing my Thora in her grave."

So I sat and listened, just because I could not bear to vex the child. And I did not know at first what she was going to tell me."

"She told me that He was a King and a King's Son—the Son of God, greater than all my gods. He wrought and cared and suffered for men, she said, because He loved them. And He died at last, to save them from the horrible pit of Hell—because He loved them."

"But it was not that which won me, Thane Edric—it was not that!"

"Colin of Y had long ago told me that Christ had died for men that hated Him, and I mocked him to scorn."

"Among us Norsemen, life is held very lightly. We should despise beyond redemption the man who would hesitate to give his life for a friend. To sympathize with a friend is a virtue—the first of virtues, but to show compassion to a foe is weakness meet only for a woman. Yet there is one burden which no man of us would bear, not for the dearest friend on earth. Worse than the pit of Hell we dread disgrace. He that would bear shame for one that loved him, and whom he loved, would be a hero of heroes with us, but he that could bear it for one who did not love him, because he loved that one—we should deem him no less than a god. We should say, as thou saidst but now—'It is too much!'"

"And that was what Hedid for men. At the hands of the very souls He died to save He bore the death of shame—He drank the very dregs of disgrace—He died a death that only a slave could die!"

"And I could not bear that, Thane. It roused my indignation when she said Hedid this great thing for men, and they were not worthy of such love as this, but she did not stop there. She said He did it for men. For me, who had hated Him, and turned a deaf ear to his friends for seventy years! I could not bear it."

"She rose up when she had told me. She only said 'Good-night,' and left me. I could not answer her a word. Did she think I was angry, poor child? Nay, I was bowed down to the very dust in abasement of soul—not before her, but before Him. It was as if He stood before me, with those bitter wounds in His hands and in His feet, and said—'Look on Me! see whom thou hast rejected and despised. See whom thou hast barred out of thy door—hast kept out of thy life. Yet I loved thee, ay, it was thou whom I loved, thou for whom I died the death of a slave. Look on me as I am, and bar thy door against Me longer if thou canst! And I could not. I could only thrust it wide open and beg Him to enter."

"I have not seen Imogen since then. The child does not know what she did that night. And I do not know anything more than she told me. I do not know what I should do to please Him, except try to be like Him, and to do what He would do. And He forgave—so I must forgive, and He loves—so I must love; and He was always doing good—so she said so—I must try always to do good too."

"So I came here, because I thought I saw one bit of work which I could do for Him, and I fancied he meant me to do it, because I do not see any one else who is both able and willing. I cannot ask anybody if I am right

or wrong. But Imogen said he knew everything—even the thoughts of a man's heart. So He will know that I meant to please Him. And if I blunder and do the wrong thing, He will forgive it, with all my worse sins which He died to put away for ever. The only point which troubles me is that I can do so little for Him, and He has done so much for me. For this is only a very little matter, such a poor nothing else, to lay at His feet! But I have nothing else."

"Now farewell, Thane Edric. The old man is not often thus garrulous. But I wanted Imogen to know what she had done that night. I want her to know that I am Christ's servant, body and soul, to be ordered about just as He pleases. Whether he bid me carry gemmed crowns upon my head or iron fetters on my feet, what matter? The fetters will lie as light as the crowns if His hand fasten them on me. I am His coracle—may He not lade me either with wool or with gold!—His drinking-horn—may He not fill me at His pleasure either with mead or vinegar? I should like Imogen to know that He has stooped to take me into His service."

"That is all. Farewell, Thane."

Edric's mind was so confused and bewildered that he had opportunity but for one question before his mysterious visitor left him.

"Thy name, friend?"

The old man hesitated, as if doubtful whether he would tell it.

"It may be as well thou should know it. Men call me Hrolf Haraldson."

And Edric was once more alone.

As soon as he felt capable of a single clear idea, the question occurred to him—how was Imogen to receive Hrolf's message by his means, as the old man had seemed to imply? Hrolf might see Imogen again; but what probability was there that Edric would ever do so?

The quiet of the dark cell was destined to be broken once more that day. The gaoler entered very late at night.

"Sir Thane," he said grimly, "I am bidden to say to thee, that thou and thy fellow Thane Bertwulf must die at sunrise to-morrow."

And away he went without another word. It was a terrible night to Edric. The hours seemed at once winged and leaden-footed. Would it never be morning to end this horrible waiting!—and yet, would that the morning were a thousand years away!

The morning broke at last. And the first intimation Edric had of it was the unwinding of the outer bolt, and the entrance of the gaoler, bearing his official keys. Poor Edric felt a great deal of his courage forsake him at this critical moment.

The gaoler set the door wide open.

"Thou mayst begone, Sir Thane. Thou art pardoned and free"

"Free!" mechanically repeated Edric, doubting the evidence of his ears.

"Thou art free," said the gaoler again.

"I heard that I was to be set free on certain conditions only. How—?"

"The conditions are fulfilled, Sir Thane."

"But how—when—by whom?" gasped Edric feverishly.

"When the King sat yesternight in hall, one offered himself who fulfilled all those conditions."

"What—of equal blood with me?"

"Of better, seeing that he had a king to his father."

"His name?"

"Citron Hrolf Haraldson of Denmark."

"But did he die? Did the King let him die for me?"

"With Thane Bertwulf, at the sunrise he died."

For a moment Edric stood as if fixed to the spot; then a deep groan of pain broke from him.

"Greater love hath no man than this!"

He knew now at what price he had been ransomed. He knew now that the poor, mean thing, which had seemed to Hrolf so unworthy of being laid at the master's feet, was the old man's own heart's blood. For this had not been done for Edric's sake, nor even for Imogen's but for Christ's. And Hrolf was recompensed. Ere this, in the stony halls of Jerusalem the Golden, he had heard the King's "Well done!" He would know now how to please Him, for he should see His face.

Yet Edric understood the full meaning of the act only very little. He had never heard the story of Thora, and he did not know how completely grace must have vanquished nature before such a deed as this

was possible to Hrolf Haraldson of Denmark.

And then came slowly to his memory, as he thought, the first interview he had with Hrolf, when he deemed him a heathen barbarian. Thoughts of bitter humiliation followed. What had he, the civilized Saxon noble, whose Christianity was of eight years' standing, ever done for God or his fellows that could for one instant compare with the deed of this heathen barbarian, only just brought into the light? How much clearer was his light than Hrolf's—and how much less worthy of it his actions!

And now he could not offer even the poor tribute of thanks to the hero who had saved him. Saved him from Hrolf—and in that hour Edric humbly determined that there should be no future question of another clause—saved him for Christ. He would take Hrolf's place as Christ's servant, he, too, would wear crown or fetter, as it seemed good to Him, he too would be—

"His cup to fill with wine or vinegar. Whichever drink might please Him at the chance."

"Hrolf Haraldson," he said, in his heart of hearts to the dead, "thou shalt not have died in vain!"

And with that vow registered in heaven, Edric went forth, a free man.—Word and Work.

HINTS TO TEACHERS ON THE CURRENT LESSONS.

(From Peloubet's Select Notes.)

May 31.—2 Tim. 3: 14-17; 4: 1-8.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS.

Dwell briefly on the history of Paul's life after he wrote the first Epistle to Timothy, and the circumstances in which his second letter was written.

The subject of the lesson is, God's Word man's light and guide.

I. Early training in God's Word (vers. 14, 15). The duty and privilege of it, as making wise for salvation for this world and the world to come. Show how it does this. Press home the privilege of learning the best passages by heart. Were I to live my life over again, I would commit to memory much more of the Bible and of the best literature than I did.

Illustration. When some one said to Coleridge that children ought not to be prejudiced in favor of religion, he took him out into a garden full of weeds, and pointed to it as a garden not prejudiced in the spring in favor of flowers and fruits. As for himself, he preferred a garden prejudiced in favor of roses and strawberries. The child's mind ought to be prejudiced in favor of all that is noble, and pure, and true.

II. The Bible God's Word (ver. 16). Enforce the fact as inspiration, without perhaps dwelling much on the theories. Write on the minds of your scholars some of the main proofs that the Bible is God's word.

III. What the Bible does for men (vers. 16, 17). Its work is to perfect our characters to make a perfect world. It is composed in every form of literature, so as to culture every part of the soul. It trains and teaches every part of our nature. The Bible is perfect in order to make perfect men.

Illustration. Xenophon tells us that at one time the Persian princes had for their teachers the four best men in the kingdom. (1) The wisest man, to teach wisdom; (2) the bravest, to teach courage; (3) the most just, to train the moral nature; (4) the most temperate, to teach self-control. We have them all in the Bible, and in Christ our teacher an example.

Illustration. From Dickens' story of the Skiznaders, in his Household Words, a good illustration can be drawn. Those parts of their bodies which were not used fell off after a while. So that among the inhabitants, some had only head and heart, some only stomach, others only hands and feet, or nerves. Only a few were perfect in body. So the soul and the character may be imperfect. The Bible student of the whole Bible uses all his powers, and is trained in all, and so becomes perfect.

IV. The Bible taught (vers. 1-4).

V. The triumph of faithfulness to God's Word (vers. 6-8).

Illustration. I once saw a beautiful picture of a bright crown, with a vanishing cross beyond it, and this legend written underneath—

"Bidding my heart look up, not down, While the cross fades before the crown."