

Family Reading.

The Hidden Treasure.

CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED.

"I think I know what you would say, my son!" said the old man, as Jack paused: "you would ask if it is not presumption to suppose that God Himself teaches and governs us? I cannot think so. It would be so, doubtless, if He had not given us warrant for it in His Word, but so long as He says He is more ready to give us the Holy Spirit than earthly parents are to give good gifts to His children, I think we are bound to believe Him. 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.' Jack," added the old man with energy, "I thank God that I have been led to open my heart to you, for the repeating of the Scriptures to you hath so refreshed my memory of them as I could not have believed possible!"

"And I am thankful as well!" said Jack. He sat musing for some minutes, and then added with emphasis, "yes, I am thankful, even though the words of Scripture should bring me to such a fate as they did Agnes Harland, Anne's friend!"

"Who is Agnes Harland?" asked his uncle. Jack started.

"I am wrong!" said he. "I promised Anne I would never tell the tale again. It was something which happened at the convent!"

The shepherd nodded sagaciously. "Aye, aye, I can guess; but say no more, dear boy. Remember that a promise broken without great necessity is a lie told, and beware of all things of lying. But this is the conclusion of the matter—God is always ready to hear the prayers of His creatures, and to help them at their need."

"But, uncle Thomas, suppose one should wish to pray for some blessing and should know no prayer which said what he wanted?"

"Then I suppose he must make one for himself, as David did, and as other saints have done. I know no other way!"

That night when Jack went to bed, he prayed that God would show him where the old Bible was hidden, or give him another. A strange feeling of awful pleasure came over him as he found himself, as it were, alone with His Maker and speaking to Him, as he might have spoken to his father. Hitherto his prayers had been a dry repetition of certain forms to be said so many times over, like a spell or incantation which was somehow to bring him certain good things or keep off certain evils—by which the saints were to be coaxed or complimented into taking up on his side, and the anger of that great and dreadful Being averted, who could hurl him and his into instant destruction. Not that I mean to intimate that all Roman Catholics pray in this spirit; but such had been Jack's feeling heretofore, and I suspect that it is the feeling of many Protestants as well. Now, however, as Jack sat in his little low-roofed chamber and recalled all he had heard as to the promises of his Heavenly Father, God seemed to draw the boy very near to Himself. And in that nearness he felt no need or desire to invoke the help of those who had been mortal like himself. The Lord of Heaven and earth was close at hand. He felt His presence as he had never felt it in the stately church, where according to the priests God was present in the host. Jack found no need of many words—hardly of words at all. He felt that his Lord saw and understood what was in his heart, and after repeating the Lord's prayer, he rose from his knees with a wonderful assurance of his Heavenly Father's love and care, and an overflowing of love for that Father such as he had never known before. From that hour Jack felt sure he should find the Bible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGERS.

A few days after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Master Lucas made his appearance at the shepherd's cottage, followed by his man Simon.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed with his usual jolly laugh, as Jack ran to help his father to dismount. "Why, this is fine, surely! This is a sight for sore eyes. Uncle Thomas, you are worth all the doctors and wise women in Bridgewater. Bless thee, boy, thy father's heart is glad to see thee so well again!"

"It is but little that I have done," said Thomas Speat. "The credit of Jack's cure belongs to the fresh air of the hill, far more than to me. But come in, come in, cousin Lucas. You must be in need of rest and refreshment. You do not often ride so far from home in these days!"

"Why, no, not of late years!" replied the baker, bowing his head to enter the low door of the cottage. "I do grow too stout for journeying a foot, and too heavy for my mule. Ho, Dame Margery, how goes all with you? Why, you look so blooming and well favoured, we shall soon see you fitted with a young bridegroom!"

"Fie, fie, Master Lucas!" replied the old woman, chuckling nevertheless at the compliment. "Well favoured is far past my time of life. But you yourself are looking finely, Master Lucas, and your voice is like our knight's hunting horn. 'Tis not often I hear any one's words so plainly!"

"Come now, I cannot have you young folk bandying fine speeches!" said the shepherd. "Bestir yourself, Dame, and provide your best refreshment for Master Lucas and his man, and for the beasts."

"Don't trouble yourself about the beasts!" said Master Lucas. "The fine fresh grass will be a treat to the poor things. I have brought thee some linen and other clothing, my lad, and Cicely has packed a whole panier of good things, beside a new gown for Margery. Bid Simon bring the things into the house!"

"And Anne, dear father!" asked Jack. "How is Anne?"

Master Lucas' open face clouded at the mention of his daughter. "Why, well in health—that is I think she would be well, if she would let herself alone, and live like the rest of us; but she is wearing herself into her grave with penances. It was but the other day I found out that she slept on the hard boards every night, and not content with that, she must needs strew ashes and gravel on them. I know not what to do with her, and that is the truth. But there is great news about the grey nun's convent, where she learned all these ways. It is to be put down by order of my Lord Cardinal, along with many others—some forty, they say—all small and poor houses like this of the grey nuns!"

"For what reason?" asked Jack.

"I do not precisely understand. For the founding of some new college or other, I believe. Anyhow; he hath the order from his Holiness the Pope, and so the nuns must budge, will they, nill they. Poor old girls! I wonder much what will become of them all. I do not love them too well, but it pities me to see them turned out of the nest where they have dwelt so long, and with no place to go; and I have told Anne, if she has any special friend among them, she may ask her to stay with us, till she can have time to turn herself."

"You are the very best man in the world, father!" said Jack warmly. "I do verily believe there was never such another."

(To be continued.)

Preparing for Hurricanes.

BY J. S. PRICHARD.

Living ninety miles from the nearest land, the 316,000 inhabitants of the 700 square miles of the Island of Mauritius await for three months in every year with anxious solicitude the coming of the hurricanes that sweep down from the equator. At the end of the year, as Christmas draws near, the watching begins.

The signal of the approach of the storms is given from the fort, at Port Louis, by the firing of a gun; but, long before the first gun is heard, every householder has made ready, by gathering in food enough to last his family many days, and by carefully examining the fastenings of every window-shutter. Not a door or a window on the entire island is without its hurricane-shutter, made of iron and painted green, and woe be to the

house if but one single shutter fails in its duty! For off goes the roof, leaving four walls full of water. The firing of the second gun is the signal for all business to cease; for the ships in the roadstead to put to sea; for the railway trains to cease running; for every man and woman on the island to get into the house or hut; to close and barricade every window and door, leaving all inside in the very blackness of darkness.

Before the second gun is fired, there have been the preparations of nature for the stupendous struggle about to take place between air and earth.

The first warning is an excessive heat; this is followed by an atmosphere so oppressive as to lead one almost to believe some unknown agency to be at work against human existence; the rays of the sun are scorching; the air is so overcharged with electricity that every living thing is made miserable; the birds flutter uneasily and fly away to the thick woods; mules stand and sniff the air; a few ragged clouds are driven wildly across the hard, coppery sky; the barometer falls rapidly, and an awful stillness pervades everything; all nature seems in a state of horrid expectancy. More driving clouds, gray and leaden, sweep swiftly past, their ragged edges catching and tangling, until the sky is covered with them.

It is then that the second signal gun gives the last warning to prepare for the worst. Gust now succeeds gust. The roaring of the wind is louder than thunder, and it is difficult to make one's voice heard inside the house. Sleep is well-nigh impossible; a fire, out of the question. The family gather in the driest room, about the lamp, and listen fearfully as each fresh blast threatens to bring the whole structure about their ears. Clothes are saturated with moisture, that drives in at every crevice, for the rain falls in sheets; the rivers are cataracts of milk-coloured water; the trees and the canes toss wildly, like live creatures in agony; forest trees bend double, and branches fly bodily off with the wind; houses are torn from their foundations and carried away; great boulders, weighing tons, are rolled over; the surface of the sea is torn up with spiral columns, revolving with great velocity; dry earth has disappeared under a sheet of water, dashed and driven into spray, that beats its way into the inmost rooms of the houses. A resident (to whom we are indebted for this description) of the island, Mr. Montague, in the hurricanes of 1874, states that at the end of the awful period his entire family were seated on the dining-table, that being the only dry place, and their only food a can of Australian mutton. Their dozen servants were huddled over a dish of charcoal in the room adjoining, their bodies in a state of incipient mildew.

No cane-fields are left standing; gardens are wrecks; houses are unroofed or blown away altogether.

In the actual eye of the cyclone a terrible calm reigns. The slower the progress of the storm, the greater the damage. It must be remembered that the velocity of the storm and the wind are distinct.

Many cyclones have passed over the island. The worst of all was that of 1848.

So vast are the forces of nature in the tropics, that a month after a hurricane has passed the trees have put on fresh leaves, the broken branches are hidden by foliage, and all nature is at work to hide, as speedily as possible, the results of her own late rage.

The hurricanes always sensibly diminish the death-rate on Mauritius and other of the islands of the Indian Ocean, by thoroughly washing out all the ravines and hollows.

—Individual effort in the world accomplishes comparatively little. Selfishness always interferes with united effort. Unselfishness is the gift of God through the Holy Spirit.

—No man can change himself. Throughout the New Testament you will find that wherever these moral and spiritual transformations are described the verbs are in the passive. Not more certain is it that it is something outside the thermometer that produces a change in the thermometer, than it is something outside the soul of man that produces a moral change upon him.—*Drummond.*