

CHOICE LITERATURE.

MORE THAN CONQUEROR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The sudden ray of brightness which shot into Anthony's mind with the conviction that he had been set free to return to Africa and his former scheme, seemed to come to him from the very light of heaven itself; for, as he looked back over the course of events since that moment when, standing by his mother's death-bed, he had given up with such bitter pain the golden dream of his youth, it seemed to him as if a divine and merciful Hand had so ruled his life and guided his actions as to bring him to a position which contained for him the promise of truest happiness, and was precisely that in which he now stood. He had resigned the noble purpose of his youth to undertake at his mother's command what seemed to himself a lower and tamer duty, and then the sweetness of an earthly joy had come to brighten the dull path into which his unwilling steps had been driven, and he had so far been unfaithful to his earlier and better hopes that he had even rejoiced to have been, by any means detained in the land where Innocentia in her loveliness was to come within his sight and knowledge.

And now his duty in England was accomplished; his mother's spirit if she could look down upon the son for whom she had feared so much, must be, so far as Rex was concerned, in perfect peace, and straightway from Anthony was withdrawn the desire of his eyes, which had blotted out from his mind the mournful scenes of African slavery; the fair dream of human love, which, sweet as it was, had been purely earthly, was quenched in final disappointment, and then, through the gloom of his mourning for its loss, there flashed upon him once again the divine radiance of the forgotten hope whose brightness was fraught with the promise of eternal day, not for himself only, but for many a burdened soul to whom this mortal world was one great prison-house. The tender mercy that had overshadowed him in all this chain of events became so clear to Anthony, that before the morning dawned on the first day of his changed life he was able to fold his wasted hands in thanksgiving for the loss that had only robbed him of earthly happiness to bestow on him a joy more pure and sweet than any which the world could either give or take away.

Then he fell into a tranquil slumber, and in sleep his memory reproduced the picture that formerly had so haunted him—the long string of suffering and weary men and women linked together, and toiling along the burning sands of the African desert under the lash of the slave-trader; he heard again the cries of pain, the wail of the mothers as the little children were torn from their grasp because the beloved burden retarded their progress, and were flung by the wayside to perish, and when Anthony woke from the vivid dream, the longing to devote himself, heart and soul to their rescue, had revived with all the ardour of his first enthusiasm for the cause.

When Vivian came to pay his visit that day to Anthony Beresford, he pushed at the door, strong man as he was, with absolute trembling at thought of this first meeting with him, after the knowledge that Innocentia had been stolen from him by his brother had come upon him in all its bitterness. He was greatly astonished, therefore, when at last he mustered sufficient courage to come forward, to see Anthony lying already dressed on his couch, with such a look of ineffable peace in his soft brown eyes, as must have sprung from the repose of a soul that had found its happiest rest in submission to the will of God. He held out his hand to Vivian with a smile that touched his friend to the heart from its pathetic sweetness.

"My dear Anthony," he said, "I am truly rejoiced to see you looking calmer and better than I could have hoped. I know what a dreadful blow has fallen upon you; believe me, I would have averted it had it in any way been possible; Anthony, you know how truly dear you are to me, yet Innocentia must come first with me before all the world, and when I recognised, as I did most fully at last, that her happiness absolutely depended upon her marriage with your brother, I had no alternative but to sacrifice you to her welfare. Indeed, it would not have availed to struggle with her, for she could not have belonged to any upon earth save to the one to whom her whole heart's love was given, even if I had thought it right to ask it of her, which I did not."

"No," said Anthony, "it would have been as deep a moral wrong as you could well have committed to seek to bind any woman to a man she could not love; but in the case of Innocentia especially, her pure and tender heart would have broken in the anguish of resisting you. She would not have consented to turn from Rex to me, even at your bidding, for it would have seemed to her a crime, as indeed it would have been, to have failed in the absolute devotion of her whole being to the one man who had gained her love. I am thankful that she never even knew the existence of any other claim upon her. Yet I know well that I had no true claim, Vivian; for she never loved me. We both were aware of that from the first, and it was folly on my part to expect that her calm friendship for me could ever grow to the deep passionate love of which we now see she is capable."

"It is true, Anthony, and you show yourself brave and generous in meeting the painful truth, as you have been in all the vicissitudes of your life. I cannot tell you how much I have suffered during the last few weeks, knowing the terrible disappointment which awaited you when you were strong enough to bear it; and yet I was obliged to act almost deceitfully in the meantime, that I might not risk quenching the feeble life which was reviving within you, by making too soon the sad revelation."

"I understand it all now," said Anthony "and I can see how wise and kind you were in refusing to let me meet Innocentia, or even Rex, alone, before I was strong enough to bear what was to come. I think a little earlier it would

have killed me. I almost felt as if it had done so even yesterday."

"That was my great fear," said Vivian; "I am pleased beyond my hopes to see you so much brighter than I expected."

"There is a secret under that which I must explain to you. It has indeed been true with me that sorrow endureth for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. I do not say that my heart does not ache still when I think of your darling, lost to me for ever. But I can feel with deepest thankfulness, that a better hope has been provided for me. Before I enter on that subject, however, I want to know your mind on some points that lie now very near my heart. Tell me, may I not hope that you will live with Rex and Innocentia, when they are married?"

"Anthony, I will tell you the truth; it is not a question of choice with me; I feel that I must. I cannot part with my child. You know it was the stipulation I made with you, and it has been the condition of my consent to her marriage to your brother. She has been my only treasure all the years of her life; I could not live in separation from her. How could I bear to think of her, brought up in absolute isolation from the world, now suddenly exposed to all its corruption and deceit, without being myself by her side to see that she passes through it in her innocence and gentleness unscathed. Even though she will leave her husband's protecting care, he cannot know her in her unconsciousness of evil as I, her father, do; and oh, Anthony, not for her sake only, but for my own, I must be with her still. I could not live if I were never to hear the music of her voice, or see the shining of her sweet eyes that have been raised to mine with every dawn of morning light since first she had power to lift up her name. I have lived for her alone, and I have a right now to live with her, even though she no longer belongs to me, as she has done from her birth to this hour. Your brother makes no objection; he seemed rejoiced for her sake that I should still remain with her."

"Yes, and to me it is still more a subject of rejoicing, for you will thus be able to watch over my brother as efficiently as I could."

"But Rex no longer requires any guardianship," said Vivian. "Do you forget that his enemy is dead?"

"No, indeed, I do not, and I have, in truth, little fear for him now; still he has once tasted of the poisoned cup of pleasure which Dacre offered to him, and I shall feel more easy if I know you are by his side, at least till the careless years of his youth are over."

"He will be my son, and while I live I shall do all I can for his welfare as devotedly as for that of my own child; but you, Anthony, surely you will be with us also?"

"No; that is the point to which I was tending in the questions I asked you. Do you not see, Vivian," continued Anthony, softly, "how the way has been opened out for me to return once more to the glorious work that won from me the first and purest devotion of my soul? You know that I have dedicated myself to labour all my life for the suppression of the slave trade in Africa—where I had seen it in all its hideous iniquity—when my mother's prayers drew me back to spend my days in the simplest duty of guarding Rex from the ill that menaced him. I felt that one soul in the sight of God was precious enough to merit the sacrifice of a life, and therefore I did not hesitate to give up mine to him, though I had hoped to have benefited hundreds in the mission I had proposed for myself; and now, is it not plain that my duty in respect to him is fully accomplished, and I am free? Dacre can harm him no more, and you will be with him—always a father and a friend, whose influence over him will be greater far than ever mine could have been. He needs me no more, and Innocentia is taken from me. Every tie that bound me to England has been rent asunder, and the path has been made straight for me that leads me back to Africa and the oppressed, who have no helper."

"Then we are to love you, Anthony?" said Vivian, taking his hand with much emotion.

"Could you bid me stay?" said Anthony, smiling. "You wondered to see me bearing so calmly the loss of her who was my dearest earthly treasure, but the thought that brought me sudden consolation in my sorrow, was the certainty that this very trial was the means ordained by Providence to restore me to the work to which I believe I have been destined from the first, and to which I now can look with certain hope that in the end it will bring me a better peace than even the love of Innocentia, had I won it, would have given. She does not need me, nor does Rex, and you still less; but the poor suffering slaves in Africa, who is there to have pity on them? God has given me to them, and shall I not go?"

"Anthony, you are right," said Vivian. "I am not selfish or base enough to hold you back from so divine a mission, and one to which you surely have been appointed; but I shall miss you, my son, how sorely I cannot tell you; it is on me your loss will fall most heavily, for Rex and Nina will be wrapped up in each other."

"But you will still have them both, and they need you, though I should be useless to them. Believe me, all is well, dear friend."

(To be continued.)

"As."—That little word has cost me more trouble than the whole vocabulary of the English language. It often makes me tremble from head to foot, and not unfrequently brings tears to my eyes. It is not the two letters of which it is formed, or just the word itself, but the place which it occupies in one of the petitions of that inimitable prayer Jesus Christ taught to his disciples: "Forgive me my debts as I forgive my debtors." There it stands as the deciding index on the beam of the balance; while in one scale is placed my prayer for forgiveness, and in the other the exact weight of my pardon. As I forgive, so Lord, forgive me. We repeat the Lord's Prayer from earliest infancy to our dying day; yet if we indulge in an unforgiving spirit we unconsciously plead for punishment, instead of mercy. The question is: Can I conscientiously use the argument, "for I also forgive every one?" And, if not, can I expect my sin-darkened soul to be washed and made whiter than snow?

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE BENEFIT OF A SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF SIN.

Let me now point out some practical uses to which the whole doctrine of sin may be profitably turned in the present day.

(a) I say, then, in the first place, that a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of *theodicy* which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity now-a-days which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably "something about Christ, and something about grace, and something about faith, and something about repentance, and something about holiness," but it is not the real "thing as it is" in the Bible. Things are out of place, and out of proportion. As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of "mingle-mangle" and does no good. It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death; and those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure and mend this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven and live like pilgrims until they really feel that they are in danger of hell. Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin, in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in Universities. Let us not forget that "the law is good if we use it lawfully," and that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." (1 Tim. i. 8; Rom. iii. 20; vii. 7.) Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men's attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length and breadth and depth and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus, and stay with Jesus, and live for Jesus, unless they really know why they are to come and what is their need. Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

(b) In the next place, a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the extravagantly broad and liberal theology which is so much in vogue at the present time. The tendency of modern thought is to reject dogmas, creeds, and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be.—Everything forsooth is true, and nothing is false! Everybody is right and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved, and nobody is to be lost!—The Atonement and Substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and enable it to keep pace with modern science.—Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, illiberal, old-fashioned, and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish Book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the Book was completed!—Now, I know nothing so likely to counteract this modern plague as constant clear statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power, and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of those men of broad views, and demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts, and tell us whether their favourite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague *earnestness*, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing something within, which all the free enquiry and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. And then we must tell them that this gnawing something is the sense of sin, guilt and corruption, which they are leaving out in their calculations. And above all we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest, but submission to the old doctrines of man's ruin and Christ's redemption, and simple child-like faith in Jesus.

(c) In the next place, a right view of sin is the best antidote to that *sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity*, which has swept over England like a flood in the last twenty-five years, and carried away so many before it. I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in this system of religion, to a certain order of minds, so long as the conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our constitution called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that a sensuous ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys, and dolls, and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once let it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it but food. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. Music, and flowers, and candles, and incense, and banners, and processions, and beautiful vestments, and confessional, and man-made ceremonies of a semi-Romish character, may do well enough for him under certain conditions. But once let him "awake and arise from the dead," and he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him more solemn triflings, and a waste of time. Once let him see his *sin*, and he must see his *Saviour*. He feels stricken with a deadly disease, and nothing will satisfy him but the Great Physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have nothing less than the bread of life. I may