

Pastor and People.

TWO-EDGED PROVERBS.

III.—"THE LONGEST WAY ROUND IS THE SHORTEST WAY HOME."

Proverbs have pre-eminently to do with every-day life, with its experiences and maxims and rules: indeed, they have for the most part taken their rise from such experiences. But they are often grounded upon abstract truth, and would be equally valuable as statements of truth, even though they had no experiences to adduce as proof of their correctness. And so it comes to pass that in many cases they stretch far beyond mere human things, into those which are Divine.

The common proverb that "The longest way round is the shortest way home" has to do with the things of this world and the next. It is a daily life truth. And first of all let us inquire what the proverb means, and its place in common daily life.

It means that what appears at first sight to be the best way to do a thing, oftentimes is not. There is something very desirable to be done—getting home—and we are in a hurry to do it, as almost every man is to get home, and in our hurry we don't stop to think, but go ahead.

It means, too, that the visible and apparent must be corrected, and oftentimes must be sacrificed to be corrected. What we see impresses us much more than what we can only reason about, and it is a great triumph of reason when we can forego under its power what is under our very eyes.

It says, moreover, that many of the ends we have in view are not to be jumped at, and accomplished all in a moment, but that we must go through certain processes to attain to them, patiently, perseveringly, ploddingly, and human nature does not like that.

Indeed, this particular proverb is one that is not generally believed—at least, not so practically believed as to be acted on.

Certain phases of character take it in—cautious and perhaps somewhat phlegmatic people; but most people are too eager, too much on the surface, too impatient, to turn it to practical account.

Now, how does this truth meet us in daily life? Here are two school-boys, who are being educated at the same school, who are intended for the same business, in the same mercantile house, and they are now engaged on the self-same task. Their present object is to get a sum done—until that sum is done they cannot go to play; and the worst of it is, it is a new rule, and the sun is shining provokingly, and altogether it would be delightful if only they could see their way to the end of it.

"Now Joe," cries one to the other, "I'll not stop at this all day!" And with a handful of marbles he bribes a boy in a higher form to do the sum; it is shown up, it is all right, and away in the sunshine runs Tom Jenkins, laughing at slow Joe as he plods along, determined, however, to work the matter out for himself. It is an hour after Tom's release that Joe finds himself honestly able to go out; but when he does get away it is with a light heart; he knows he has done his duty; he has ten times more enjoyment than his companion; he has the consciousness of duty fulfilled, of having been honest, of having a right to play. Pass on four or five years. Many a trouble has Tom Jenkins had from that short cut he took with the sum. He has always to go bungling along from not perfectly understanding that rule; more than once he was kept in an hour for his arithmetic; and where will it end? Pass on ten years more, and at eight o'clock in the evening you see a poor clerk drudging away at a whole wilderness of figures; that is Tom, tried and found wanting, and doomed to remain a clerk to the end of his days; and at the very same hour you may see Mr. Joseph Burgen sitting at a meat-table with his young wife, and telling her that his share of the profits this year as junior partner in the house of Birkit, Johnson, and Burgen, will be £900. It was a long way round that beautiful summer afternoon with that tough sum, but Joseph Burgen plodded all through it, and has come out well at the end.

The road certainly does make a long round of it from Farmer Thompson's homestead to the market-town of Astonhope, and it is very provoking to have to cart produce some five miles, when by going across country the place can be reached by a lane only two miles long. But there are weighty reasons for that road, and weighty ones against that lane. The ground about Farmer Thompson's, though splendid for grazing, is rather boggy and marshy, and very undependable as to soundness of bottom, especially in the winter time. The engineer who made that road had no less than twenty men with him, poking and raking, to find the firmest bottom. No one knows all this better than Farmer Thompson's son William. He has been to Astonhope with a wagon-load of wheat, and having gone round the regular road, has sped well. The wheat is sold, and Will has to bring back in the wagon the week's groceries, and a sack of beer, and a barrel of oil, and a sack of flour, and a new suit of

clothes for his father; there is, moreover, a hand-box containing a new bonnet for one Jenny Ray, who looks well in Will's eyes at all times, and who he thinks will look especially well in this bonnet. Jenny lives about half a mile from Will's house, on the short-cut road; and now he thinks the wagon is light, and he may venture across country, and by so doing he will have the advantage of delivering the bonnet and seeing Jenny a little sooner. Alas, he came to grief! With great care, and with many escapes, the young man got to pretty nearly opposite Jenny Ray's door; and even now he was not much the gainer in the way of time; for what with the time consumed in taking care, instead of going ahead, and in extricating himself from one rut and another, he might have been nearly home by this. But the worst has to come. Snap goes the axle, close to Jenny's house, as Will is driving the wagon through quite a pond of water. Down rolls Will in the mud: out comes Jenny to laugh at Will for the ridiculous plight he is in, and then to scold him for the loss of her bonnet. The ale is spilled, the oil floats out on the top of the black water, the wheat is soaked, the groceries are spoiled, the farmer's clothes are done for. It is a week from that very day that the remnants of the wagon are brought home; it is a fortnight before the vehicle is put together again; Jenny and Will never make up that day's falling out; and altogether it forms a very pretty illustration of the proverb that "The longest way round is the shortest way home."

Nothing is ever eventually gained by shirking, or ignoring truth. What is, is; and no hiding of ourselves from the truth, or of the truth from ourselves, will ever prevent it being otherwise. The longest way round is the longest way by perhaps one, two, or twenty miles, as the case may be, but it is the shortest in the end. In sailing to and from Australia, I had an example of this. Any one looking at our course on the map would have said we were going altogether out of our way; and it is true we sailed over a greater number of miles than we apparently necessary, but we gained many days in time; for we caught certain winds which were known to be found in certain latitudes, and sailed ten miles in an hour where we should not have sailed two on the short cut; and so we found the proverb true that, "The longest way round was the shortest way home."

We must say "This is a long way round," but it is one with a purpose, and I am travelling on it because I know it will be the quickest way of carrying out my design in the end.

We must believe in the long and short of the matter, the long way round, and the short way. And if we do, see how it will act.

A thorough belief in the truth of this proverb will make us patient. Patience is, in general, a necessary ingredient for success. An act of impatience will spoil whole months, or even years, of work. But we shall be patient if we are certain that we are on the right road; and that the end of the road, however round about it may go, is the goal to which we want to attain. It will make us hopeful. A down-spirited man has little or no energy for his work and if he sees no end to his toil, he is likely to faint by the way. But when we have an end to our labour practically, though not actually, in view, we shall be cheery; we know that "long looked-for" will "come at last;" the very energy which this will infuse into us will help to grow over the ground of the long round about way, and bring us to our goal far sooner than we should have reached it had we plodded along without going to our work with a will.

There will be ever so much more diligence too. No one cares to work for what has no end—to go round and round, like a horse in a mill. Let us say "Home, home—an end—on our way to it, and that the shortest too;" and then we shall be a man to our work.

And now to look at the spiritual side of this proverb: we can see many points in which it is a true saying as regards the higher matters of our spiritual interest.

The longest way round is with God very often the shortest way to accomplish His designs. All Nature is full of processes which are round-about. Let us take a short cut to open out a bud into a flower—a little picking and unfolding with our fingers, no matter how carefully done, will leave us nothing but the wreck and ruin of what might have been beautiful and perfect if only we had let it go through God's processes in God's way and God's time. See what a round-about way the child has to travel before he gets the strength or wisdom of a man; what a round-about way the fruit has to come to be ripe and mellow—passing through bud, and hard acidity, and hanging for many a day upon the wall apparently red and ripe but really hard and unfit for use. Winds and sun and time mellow it at last, by the processes of God.

And so God is continually leading His people by what may seem to them long ways round; but they are ever with the view of bringing them most safely, and most quickly too, Home.

"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," is the voice which we are now often called upon to hear, and to act upon in simple belief.

God leads us in ways we know not of, but He knows all about them; and if only we be sure that He is leading us by the hand, we may be sure that there can be no mistake. He knows where He is taking us to. He, who has made our home, knows where it is, and the best way to it; and there is no necessity for our knowing the path, if He does. We are often presumptuous in wanting to know too much, just as on the other hand we are often slothful in caring only to know too little; but God will not give an account of His matters; very often all He will say to us is: "That is the road I have appointed for thee; day by day travel patiently thereon."

When we seem to be set providentially upon a path which we cannot understand, let us believe that it has a blessed ending, and that the God who has set us on it knows all the circumstances of the way. The child need not understand all about the road he is travelling if his father does; we need not know all about this dispensation and that, if our Father does. If we can fall back on a real knowledge of what

God is, and of our connection with Him, we shall not be confounded by any intricacies of our road.

When the time comes for a Christian to die, and he looks back upon the experiences of perhaps a long and chequered life, he will say: "He hath led me forth by the right way, that I might come to a city of habitation" (Ps. civ. 7). Perhaps in eternity we shall see whether our own short cuts would have led us—how some of them terminated suddenly in the precipice of sin; how others would have fixed our feet in miry clay or on them with pointed stones; how others had dwelling by their road-side enemies able either to allure or force us on to ruin. Then we shall see that the same God led us that led the Israelites of old, and with the same consideration and care. "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea" (Exod. xiii, 17, 18).

That was a long way round appointed in mercy, but there was another, lasting for forty years, which the Israelites brought upon themselves in judgment. Let us beware of bringing upon ourselves these "long ways round"—full of sorrow, even though manna be given to us to sustain our life.

And now as to God's dealing with us in our acquisition of character and being made holy: is there a long way round in those? Very often—so often as to warrant our saying generally there is. Characters are formed as fruits are developed and ripened—by processes.

No doubt there are times when some great sorrow, or some extraordinary circumstances into which a man is thrown, seem to form his character at once; at least, to form it in some points which, under ordinary circumstances, might have taken a long time. But these are exceptional cases; in a general way, it is by many long ways round that character is formed. The patient man has had to bear many a long day's trial; the humble man has had to pass through many a humiliation; the heavenly-minded has had to go through many earth-weanings; the faithful man has had to grope in darkness for many days, when neither sun nor moon, nor stars appeared. Short cuts might have made surface characters, but the long way round has brought to heaven men fitted for eternity.

Bearing this in mind, we may be very hopeful for ourselves, very hopeful for and patient with others. We are not deserted of the Spirit of God because we are not slaying every enemy at a stroke. The walls of Jericho were compassed once a day for six days, and on the seventh day, seven times; then, and not till then, was the long blast with the horn to be given; not till then were the people allowed to shout; but the long way round was the shortest way in the end, for then the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city (Josh. vi. 20).

We are very apt to despair about ourselves or others, if we do not see quick progress; but even failures may be round-about ways to success, and though real in themselves, be only apparent as regards the great result. We often rise from our failures far stronger than we were before; and they have done for us what no precept could have accomplished.

Let this teach us patience with others, and with ourselves too. God is patient with us; then let us be patient with ourselves—not tolerant of evil, but patient and hopeful in our conflict with it.

Everywhere we turn we are met with mystery—with the unknown; every day we see that it is not safe always to judge by the seeing of the eye, and the hearing of the ear. Let the One who has made our home for us, eternal in the heavens, be the One to guide us thither how He will. It is not for us to know the times, or seasons, or paths, which the Father keeps in His own power. Let us put our hand humbly but confidently in His, assured that if He lead us so, even "The longest way round is the shortest way home."

Ministerial Reputation.

You have not failed to notice how little it takes to blast the reputation and destroy the power of a minister. Unlike the tradesman, the farmer, or the mechanic, his whole stock in trade is reputation. Blow upon the good name of your secular man, and all is not lost; he can still work in wood or iron, and his crops will grow and his bank stocks increase all the same. He is not entirely at the mercy of other people.

With the minister it is totally different. As his investments are solely in reputation, they are sensitive to the touch of perverse tongues. More than any other person he is in the hands of the community, especially in those of his friends who are usually able to make of him much or little, or nothing, as they elect. To reduce him to zero, they do not need to make great exertion; a word, a look, an ominous silence at the right moment, or a sly insinuation, gives the fatal stab to reputation. He may protest and deny, but in vain; he is dead for that people and has nothing more to do but to pack up and be off to parts unknown. Even then the slander may travel in advance of him, and be ready to stare him in the face the moment he arrives on the spot.

The perishable nature of this ministerial commodity should warn both the preacher and people to handle it carefully. There is danger that it perish in the using. It will not endure to be handled roughly; and is invariably to be kept right side up with care. That so few ministers suffer severely in their reputation speaks well for both the pastors and the people. That some have thrown their lives away for such trivial considerations is sad, and should serve as a warning to all their associates. Cherish most tenderly the jewel God has seen fit to commit to your care.—*Zion's Herald*.

Demands not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.

How sweet to the believer is the reflection that, though he is yet a stranger in the world of spirits, still the world of spirits is not a stranger to him.—*Toplady*.

At the Bar.

"Who speaks for this man?" From the great white Throne,
Velled in its roseate clouds the voices came forth;
Before it stood a parted soul alone,
And rolling east and west, and south and north,
The mighty accents summoned quick and dead
"Whospeaks for this man ere his doom be said?"

Shivering he listened, for his earthly life
Had passed in dull, unnoted calm away;
He brought no glory to its daily strife,
No wealth of fame, or genius' fiery ray;
Weak, lone, ungifted, quiet and obscure,
Born in the shadow, dying 'mid the poor

Lo, from the solemn concourse hushed and dim,
The widow's prayer, the orphan's blessing rose,
The stranger's tale of trouble shared by him,
The lonely of sheared hours and softened woes;
And like a chorus spoke the crushed and sad,
"He gave us all he could, and what he had;"

And His words of loving kindness said,
And tender thoughts, and help in time of need,
Sprang up, like leaves by soft Spring showers fed,
In some waste corner, sown by chance-dung seed;

In grateful wonder heard the modest soul,
Such trifles gathered to so best a whole.

O ye, by circumstance' strong fetters bound,
The store so little, and the hand so frail,
Do but the best ye can for all around;
Let sympathy be true, nor courage fail;
Winning among your neighbors poor and weak
Some witness at your trial hour to speak.

—All the Year Round.

Impossible to Pervert the Bible.

The Bible becomes really incapable of being perverted by the interpolation of texts, by the extraction of texts which stand properly in their places, so that the revelation shall be made to teach another doctrine than that which it ought to bring from God. We do not think of this, perhaps, as often as we should.

We hear so much said of this suspected text, and that doubtful passage, of this probable interpolation from the margin, and of the long quarrel which scholars have waged over that Greek letter, mark or accent, that we sometimes forget that God, in his constitution of the Bible, has made it impossible to seriously pervert it. Of course there will be erroneous transcriptions. The hand of the scribe is not inspired. Of course there may be here and there insertions, of a marginal note, written into the text. Of course there may be a word dropped out, or a vowel omitted, in one passage or another. The eye of the scribe will sometimes fail to discern distinctly what it sees or what it omits; and there must be of necessity more or less liability to minute error in making copies of so many writings. But the great course of doctrine cannot be eliminated from the Scripture, except as you tear the whole fabric into tatters. It is interwoven, every part with every other—story, law, precept, proverb, the biographies of Christ by the evangelists, and the argument of Christ by the apostles, and the vision of Christ in the Apocalypse; until, if you throw away one part, you must equally throw away many others. You may get rid of the story of Balaam; though, if you do, you will miss one of the most picturesque and impressive stories in all the Old Testament. But what then will you do with the references to him in Micah, in Peter, and in the Revelation? You may get rid, perhaps, of the miracle in the passage of the Red Sea, and suppose a mere shift of the wind when Pharaoh's army was divinely destroyed. But what then are you to do with the song of Moses and of Miriam? and what with the seventy-eighth psalm, and the one hundred and sixth, and the one hundred and fourteenth? and what with the "song of Moses and the Lamb" in the crowning book of the Apocalypse? They are interbraided, like threads that have been woven so closely together that you cannot tear them apart except by destroying the fabric. You cannot extract one and leave the rest, with any ingenuity or by any force.

Thus it fares with the difficulties in the Biblical text, of which sceptics have sometimes made so much. Necessarily, always, by the manifold constitution of the Scripture, they must amount to very little. They are like scratches on the stones of the Milan Cathedral; like the breaking of a single pane of its pictured glass, or the breaking off of a finger, or possibly a forearm, from one of its five thousand statues. The great structure stands unimpaired, shining, imperial, in the serene Italian air. The Bible stands majestic, unfractured, in the same way. You may take away a vowel here, or throw away an accent there; you may pick up a word which has been dropped, or throw out a word which has been added; but God in his wisdom has made it so multi-form, so many-sided and various in its parts, and has involved each part so perfectly with all the others, that you cannot destroy it except by annihilating its whole structure. The Jewish counting of words and letters insured extraordinary accuracy to its copies. But no inaccuracy could touch its life, unless it were repeated hundreds of times.—*Rev. R. S. Storrs, D.D.*

Acceptance and Vengeance.

The Rev. O. H. Spurgeon, in a sermon preached August 12th, on Isaiah, lxi. 2, says:

May the Lord help us while we speak upon the second part of the text: the "day of vengeance of our God." Does not the sound of vengeance grate upon your ear? Does it not seem discordant to the sweet tenor of the passage? Vengeance? Shall that happen side by side with acceptance? Yes, beloved, this is the mystery of the Gospel, the system of redemption marries justice and mercy; the method of suretyship unites severity and grace; the economy of substitution blends acceptance and vengeance. Let us explain this strange commingling, and at the same time expand the text.

In the first place, whenever there is a day of mercy to those who believe, it is always a day of responsibility to those who reject it, and if they continue in that state, it is a day of increased wrath to unbelievers. It is not possible for the Gospel to be without some effect. If it be a savor of life unto life to those who receive it, it must of necessity from its own intrinsic vigor be a savor of death unto death to those who reject it. To this sword there are two

edges—one will kill our fears, or the other will surely kill our pride and destroy our vain hopes, if we yield not to Christ. You may, perhaps, have noticed that when our Lord read this passage at Nazareth, He stopped short, He did not read it all; He read as far down as, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," and then He closed the book, and gave it to the minister and sat down. I suppose that at the commencement of His ministry, before He had been rejected by the nation, and before He had suffered for sin, He wisely chose to allude to the gentler topics rather than to those more stern and terrible ones; but He did not conclude His ministry without referring to the stern words which followed those which He had read. Mark you, then, dear hearer, that if you have heard the Gospel and rejected it, you have incurred great guilt, and you can never sin so cheaply as you did before; for you there will be a day of vengeance above the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, because you have perpetrated a crime which they are not capable of committing—you have rejected the Christ of God. The year of acceptance to believers will be a day of vengeance to those who obey not His Gospel.

Random Readings.

MANY people are busy in this world busy gathering together a handful of thorns to sit upon.—*Jeremy Taylor*.

Nor daring to take comfort—as if it was unlawful to take God at His word! as if it was humility to count the God of Truth a liar!

PAUL begins by enumerating their blessings. No one could be more full of present, but he begins with privilege—the true Gospel way of beginning.

The truest help we can render to an afflicted man, is not to take his burden from him, but to call out to his best strength, that he may be able to bear the burden.—*Phillips Brooks*.

LET us pray God that he would root out of our hearts everything of our planting, and set out there, with his own hands, the tree of life, bearing all manner of fruits.—*Penelon*.

The heavenly city has some of its lower streets upon earth, and he who does not enter those lower streets here will never enter the upper ones above. The consummation in glory, but the beginning here.

CULTIVATE a loving manner. How much harm is done by a disagreeable Christian! O! it is a sad thing to fold up in a napkin the talent of manner, to lose the key of the cabinet, to forget the sesame to the hearts of men.

I CANNOT love my neighbor as myself, till I love God with all my heart. I cannot love God but from a sense of love to me in the forgiveness of my sins; and I cannot receive forgiveness from him as a benefit till I know my want of it.—*Rev. T. Adams*.

EVERY promise is built upon four pillars: God's justice and holiness, which will not suffer Him to deceive; His grace of goodness, which will not suffer Him to forget; His truth, which will not suffer Him to change; and His power, which makes Him able to accomplish.—*Salter*.

We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction; a hand is put into theirs which leads them forth towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's.—*George Eliot*.

BELIEVE me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that of all which belong to us, the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others. Whatever is best is safest, lies most out of the reach of human power, can neither be given nor taken away.—*Bolingbroke*.

DEAN STANLEY said recently, speaking of Milton, that "he was not mentioned by Clarendon, the historian of his time. This seemed curious, but it had happened over and over again, and was almost a law, that the most eminent man of his time was hardly ever mentioned by the chief historian of the time."

Joy is a prize unbought, and is freest, purest in its flow, when it comes unthought. No getting into heaven as a place will compass it. You must carry it with you, else it is not there. You must have it in you as the music of a well-ordered soul, the fire of a holy purpose, the willing-up, out of the central depths, of eternal springs, that hide these waters here.—*Bushnell*.

I ONCE heard a very earnest and evangelical minister say that he had been accosted by a man who had heard him preach with this criticism: "I don't like your theology, it is too bloody; it savors of the shambles; it is all blood, blood, blood. I like the pleasant Gospel." He replied, "Well, my theology is blood; it recognizes as its foundation a very sanguinary scene, the death of Christ, with bleeding hands and feet and side. And I am quite content; it should be bloody; for God hath said that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.'"

It seems a paradox, and yet it is undoubtedly true, that the faults of those nearest and dearest to us not only grieve us more keenly than the faults of our acquaintances, but also rouse in us, for the time, at least, a livelier indignation. Nor is this really strange. The failings of the world at large touch us chiefly in so far as they afflict suffering or injury upon ourselves or others. But the failings of those we love do this, and much more than this. They disturb the ideal we would fain cherish in our minds—an ideal which, though it may not create our love, is the source of all our satisfaction in it. We cannot rest while disapproval or contempt are farring ever so slightly with our deep affection. We cannot carelessly dismiss the grievance with an unspoken stricture and forget it. We long to reform, or at least to testify, to give vent to our pain, to exert either an avowal of error which may condone the offense, or an explanation which may justify it; and just because we are so anxious we cannot always seek temperately for the relief we need. Hamlet's people might, "dipping all his faults in their affections, convert his gybes to graces," but it is not so that our affections mostly work.—*Sunday Magazine*.