

Messenger and Visitor

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A Modern Apostle.*

In all missionary literature there probably has not appeared a book of more absorbing interest for all classes of readers than that in which John G. Paton has told the story of his experience as a pioneer missionary among the islanders of the New Hebrides. The work was first published in 1889 in two volumes, and at once found many readers. Later it was issued in an abridged form as a Young Folks' edition. Of this latter a fifth edition has just been published, and doubtless many succeeding editions will be required; for one cannot conceive that there will ever come upon the stage a generation of young people who will not be interested in the book. Scarcely any book of adventures could stir more strongly the youthful imagination, while the dauntless courage, the indomitable perseverance, the self-sacrificing Christian love and the heroic faith of the unconscious hero of the book can scarcely fail to make lasting impressions upon the heart and life of the young reader. The volume before us is well printed on superior paper, fairly well bound, a book of 300 pages, with illustrations, and the price is fifty cents. It would be hard to say how a parent could better spend a half dollar than by putting this book into the hand of his son or daughter. A boy will devour its contents as eagerly as he would Robinson Crusoe or the Adventures of Gulliver, and, when he has finished the book, there will remain imprinted on his mind the picture of a life and a ministry which are as truly apostolic as were Paul's.

In a small cottage, on the farm of Braehad, in the parish of Kirmahoe, County of Dumfries, Scotland, John Gibson Paton was born on the 24th of May, 1824. The atmosphere of the home in which he was reared was strongly religious, but the element of sternness which has been generally associated with Scottish piety seems to have been absent. His parents were godly people, his father especially being a man of deeply spiritual nature. The boy attended the village school, learned his father's trade of weaver, and, by making the best use of his opportunities, gradually worked his way through college and into the ministry, to which he had from boyhood felt himself called. It is a highly interesting story, the struggles and toils of these earlier years, making for the development of mind and character.

It was in answer to the call of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland for a missionary to join Rev. John Inglis in the New Hebrides that Mr. Paton was led to offer himself to that work. In August, 1858, Mr. Paton, with Mrs. Paton and a Mr. Copeland who had accompanied them, reached the New Hebrides. The island at which they first landed was Aneityum, where Mr. and Mrs. Inglis and Mr. and Mrs. Geddie were laboring with very encouraging success. It was arranged that the new missionaries from Scotland, with Mr. and Mrs. Matthieson, who were from Nova Scotia, should establish stations on Tanna, a neighboring island, the people of which were entirely heathen and savage. After some preliminary work in the way of house-building, Mr. and Mrs. Paton, and Mr. Copeland with their effects were landed at Port Resolution, Tanna, on the 5th of November, 1858. It was nearly twenty years before this that the missionaries Williams and Harris had been clubbed to death on

*The story of John G. Paton, rewritten for the young, Toronto; Fleming H. Revell Company. Price 50 cents.

Erromango, and others who had come to take up their work had been compelled to flee. The martyrdom of the Gordons on the same island was yet to come. On Aneityum, however, the missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Geddie, who came from Nova Scotia in 1848, and Mr. and Mrs. Inglis, who a little later came from Scotland, had been kindly received by the natives and the work of evangelization on that island progressed steadily from the first. The experience of Mr. Paton on Tanna was, however, to be very different. In March of the next year his first terrible blow came in the death of his young wife and their infant son. Soon after he was himself stricken with fever and his life seemed to hang by a thread, but his faith and his courage did not fail.

About four years were spent by Mr. Paton on this island of Tanna, most of the time alone among the natives, in the midst of a fierce, warring, superstitious people, addicted to cannibalism and many horrible and cruel customs. The record of these years as given in Dr. Paton's book is certainly one of the most remarkable narratives ever penned. At first the people seemed not unfriendly, but their interest in the missionary was principally that of curiosity and the desire to trade with him. Soon their superstitious apprehensions became aroused. If rain failed to come when expected, if sickness or any calamity occurred, it was the missionary who had caused it, and soon the savages were plotting to destroy him. How they were kept back from their revengeful purpose one can but wonder. Often and often the club or the tomahawk of the savage would be raised to strike the fatal blow, many a time they leveled their muskets at the missionary. But, sustained by a sense of the presence of his Lord, he faced them with indomitable faith and courage, and a higher power than theirs or his restrained the murderous hands of the savages. Some of the chiefs became bitterly hostile to the missionary, and some showed him a more or less fickle kindness,—their dark minds vacillating between the new truths which were becoming a glimmering light to them and the traditional superstitions which still clouded their mental horizon.

We cannot of course take space to tell even in the most cursory way the thrilling story of Dr. Paton's work in the New Hebrides,—his reluctant relinquishment of the work on Tanna when the fierce opposition of the savage chiefs made continuance there impossible, his visit to Australia and Scotland on behalf of the mission and his return (after his second marriage) to Aniwa, another island of the New Hebrides group, which for some fifteen years was his home and field of labor. Here many of the experience which Mr. Paton had passed through on Tanna were repeated. Constantly, for a time, the lives of the missionaries were threatened. Frequently they were in extreme peril, but wonderfully, miraculously, they were preserved, until at length, the gospel won its way into the darkened hearts of the people, and the whole island became evangelized. A like work has gone on in Erromango, Tanna and other islands of the group, and, as the world knows, the evangelization of the New Hebrides is one of the marvels of modern missions. During the later years of his life Dr. Paton has made his home in Melbourne, Australia. He has travelled widely in Great Britain, the United States and Canada in the interest of the mission to which in his youth his life was consecrated. In 1892 he visited these provinces, and large audiences in many places were thrilled by the recital of his missionary experiences. Those who heard him, felt that they were listening to a man of Apostolic faith and devotion. Christians of all names rejoice in his work. Many have read Dr. Paton's book, and to those who have not, we commend it as a book most attractive in itself and most worthy to be read for the example of faith, of courage, and self-sacrificing devotion to a noble cause, which it sets forth.

A Lesson on Forgiveness.

The diligent student is sure to be asking questions of his teacher, and the character of the questions which he asks indicates the degree of progress he is making. This is as true of the Christian disciple as of any. It seems evident from Peter's question in the Bible lesson for this week, that he was not altogether an unapt scholar in the school of Christ. Doubtless it was not quite easy for so impetuous a man as Peter to be patient and forgiving toward those who might do him injury. But this impulsive man had a generous heart.

When the first flash of anger was past, we can imagine that he was quite ready to forgive those who had done him wrong. His question recognizes forgiveness as a duty. But the question is, to what degree, how often shall one forgive the man that sins against him? When Peter suggested seven times as the limit, he probably thought that this was a stretch of magnanimity which his Master would certainly appreciate and commend; this was a charity far exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees. In the Talmud three times is the limit prescribed. In reply the Master said: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." We are not to understand this in a strictly literal or mathematical sense. Our Lord did not mean to say that if one had forgiven another for four hundred and ninety offences, he had exhausted the virtue of forgiveness, and that at the four hundred and ninety first offence he would be doing right to return hate for hate and injury for injury.—He rather meant, as the parable which follows more clearly shows, to say that the duty of forgiving one's fellowmen is not to be measured by arithmetic, but by the infinite grace of God in his forgiveness of sinners.

There are some highly important truths taught very impressively in this parable of the lesson. We are not of course to expect to find a spiritual analogy to every detail of it. Our Lord used parables for the sake of throwing a strong light on particular phases of truth concerning the kingdom of heaven. We do not therefore find the whole truth about the kingdom set forth in one parable, but we must inquire in the case of each parable what particular truths it emphasizes.

One of the truths which this parable is evidently intended to teach is that every man is indebted to God altogether beyond the power of man to pay. When God calls men before him and reckons with them on the basis of justice, what can they do? If any man is called upon to pay the debt which he owes to God, if anyone is required to make restitution for what he has squandered of God's good gifts and to give satisfaction for the abuse of the trusts reposed in him, what can he do but fall upon his face and cry for mercy?

Then again, the parable teaches that men are to expect that God will surely call them to account. The "King" of the parable had given his servant, a free rein it seems, but he had not abdicated his throne or laid down his authority. So it is in God's relation to the world. Men may seem to carry things with a high hand for a time, and for a long time, perhaps. Still, the world belongs to God, not to Satan, to Mammon or to Fate. *God rules here*; men are his servants, and sooner or later he reckons with them. We can by no means escape from our relations to God and from the supreme obligation to love and serve him with all our hearts. This is a truth which Jesus set forth very strongly, and it deserves much stronger emphasis than it is receiving in many quarters at the present day. It is a very serious and a very wholesome question for everyone to consider,—Suppose God should call me now and reckon with me as to my duty towards him, how should I stand that reckoning?

A third lesson is that, what we are called upon to forgive to one another is wholly insignificant in comparison with the debt which God compassionately forgives the penitent suppliant of his grace. The sum which the king had freely forgiven his dishonest, but apparently penitent, servant was six hundred times as great as that for which that servant seized his fellow servant by the throat and thrust him into prison. The latter was a debt which might easily be paid, and if it remained unpaid, it was of comparatively trifling importance to the creditor. But the debt to the king was evidently one altogether beyond the power of the debtor to discharge. The thought of what we owe to God should have great power to calm the storm of resentment and revenge toward our fellowman, whenever it arises in our breasts.

Highly important is this fifth lesson, that unless men do forgive one another they cannot hope to be forgiven of God. In our Lord's prayer the petition for forgiveness is couched in terms which indicate that only he who brings to the mercy-seat a forgiving spirit can hope for a forgiveness from the Father in Heaven. And then, on the other hand, when one's heart has been touched by the pardoning love of God, he cannot cherish a hard unforgiving spirit toward his fellowman. That man

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