

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

BY REV. E. F. KIRK, AUTHOR OF "FROM TEST TO EARNEST."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.—Continued.

When Mrs. Arnot had learned from Haldane the nature of his present employment, she had experienced both pleasure and misgivings. That he was willing to take and try to do such work rather than remain idle, or take what he felt would be charity, proved that there was more good metal in his composition than she had even hoped; but she naturally felt that the stinging annoyances of his position would soon become intolerable. She was not surprised although she was somewhat perplexed, at the receipt of the following letter:

"MY DEAR MRS. ARNOT,—You have been such a true, kind friend to me, and have shewn so much interest in my welfare, that I am led to give you a fuller insight into my present experiences and hopes. You know that I wish to be a Christian. You have made Christian manhood seem the most desirable thing that I can ever possess, but I make little or no progress toward it. Something must be done and quickly, too. Either there must be a great change in me, or else in my circumstances. As there is no immediate prospect of the latter, I have been led to hope that there can be such a change in me that I shall be lifted above and made superior to the exasperating annoyances of my condition. Yes, I am hoping even far more. If I could only experience the marvellous change which Dr. Barstow described so eloquently last Sunday evening, might I not do right easily and almost spontaneously? It is so desperately hard to do right now. If conversion will render my steep, thorny path, infinitely easier, then surely I ought to seek this change by every means in my power. Indeed there must be a change in me, or I shall lose even the foothold I have gained. I am subjected all day to insult and annoyance. At times I am almost desperate and on the verge of recklessness. Every one of the coarse creatures that I am compelled to work with is a nettle that loses no chance to sting me, and there is one among them, a big, burly fellow, who is so offensive that I cannot keep my hands off him much longer if I remain my old self. You also know what a reception I must ever expect in the streets when I am recognized. The people act as if I were some sort of a reptile, which they must tolerate at large, but can, at least, shun with looks of aversion. And then, when I get to Mr. Growther's cottage I do not find much respite. It seems like ingratitude to write this, but the good old man's eccentric habit of berating himself and the world in general has grown wearisome, to say the least. I want to be lifted out of myself—far above these petty vexations and my own miserable weaknesses.

"Once, before I left home, I played a rude joke on our good old pastor. Instead of resenting it he wrote me such a kind letter that I went to his study to apologize. While there his manner and words were such that I had to break away to escape a sad-ten and mysterious influence that inclined me toward all that is good. I have hoped that if I should visit him I might come under that influence again, and so be made a new and different man.

"I have also another motive, which you will understand. Mother and I differ widely on many things, and always will, but I long to see her once more. I have been thinking of late of her many kindnesses—Oh, that she had been less kind, less indulgent. But she cannot help the past any more than I can, and it may do us both good to meet once more. I do not think she will refuse to see me or give me shelter for a few hours, even though her last letter seemed harsh.

"I shall also be glad to escape for a few hours from my squalid and wretched surroundings. The grime of the sordid things with which I have so long been in contact, seems eating into my very soul, and I long to sleep once more in my clean, airy room at home.

"But I am inflicting myself too long upon you. That I have ventured to do so is due to your past kindness, which I can only wonder at, but cannot explain.

"Gratefully yours, E. HALDANE."

Mrs. Arnot was more than curious; she was deeply interested in the result of this visit, and she hoped and prayed earnestly that it might result in good. But she had detected an element in the young man's letter which caused her considerable uneasiness. His idea of conversion was a sudden and radical change in character that would be a sort of spiritual magic, contravening all the natural laws of growth and development. He was hoping to escape from his evil habits and weaknesses, which were of long growth, as the leper escaped from his disease by a healing and momentary touch. He would surely be disappointed; might he not also be discouraged, and give up the patient and prayerful struggle which the sinner must ever wage against sin in this world? She trusted however that God had commenced a good work in his heart, and would finish it.

Even the sight of his native city with its spires glistening in the setting sun, moved Haldane deeply; and when in the dusk he left the train, and walked once more through the familiar streets, his heart was crowded with pleasant and bitter memories, which naturally produced a softened and receptive mood.

He saw many well-remembered faces, and a few glanced at him, as if he suggested one whom they had known. But he kept his hat drawn over his eyes, and, taking advantage of the obscurity of the night, escaped recognition.

"It is almost like coming back after one has died," he said to himself. "I once thought myself an important personage in this town, but it has got on better without me than it would have done with me. Truly, Mrs. Arnot is right—it's little the world cares for any one, and the absurdity of all blunders is to live for its favour."

It was with a quickly-beating heart that he rang the bell at the parsonage, and requested to be shewn up to Dr. Marks' study. Was this the supreme moment of his life, and he on

the eve of that mysterious, spiritual change, of which he had heard so much, and the results of which would carry him along as by a steady, mighty impulse through earth's trials to heaven's glory? He fairly trembled at the thought.

The girl who had admitted him pointed to the open study door, and he silently crossed its threshold. The good old clergyman was bending over his sermon, to which he was giving his finishing touches, and the soft rays of the student's lamp made his white hair seem like a halo about his head.

The sacred quiet of the place was disturbed only by the quill of the writer, who was penning words as unworldly as himself. Another good old divine looked down benignantly and encouragingly at the young man from his black walnut frame. He was the sainted predecessor of Dr. Marks, and the sanctity of his life of prayer and holy toil also lingered in this study. Old volumes and heavy tomes gave to it the peculiar odour which we associate with the cloister, and suggested the prolonged spiritual musings of the past, which are so out of vogue in the hurried practical world of to-day. This study was indeed a quiet nook—a little, slowly-moving eddy, left far behind by the dashing, foaming current of modern life; and Haldane felt impressed that he had found the hallowed place, the true Bethel, where his soul might be born anew.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.—THE MIRACLE TAKES PLACE.

"The body of my sermon is finished; may the Lord breathe into it the breath of life!" ejaculated Dr. Marks, leaning back in his chair.

Haldane now secured his attention by knocking lightly on the open door. The old gentleman arose and came forward with the ordinary kindly manner with which he would greet a stranger.

"You do not remember me," said Haldane.

"I cannot say that I do. My eyesight is not as good as when I was at your age."

"I am also the last one you expect to see, but I trust I shall not be unwelcome when you know my motive for coming. I am Egbert Haldane, and I have hoped that your study would remain open, though nearly all respectable doors are closed against me."

"Egbert Haldane! Can I believe my eyes?" exclaimed the old clergyman, stepping eagerly forward.

"When last in this place," continued the youth, "I was led by your generous forgiveness of my rude behaviour towards you to say that if ever I wished to become a Christian I would come to you sooner than to anyone else. I have come, for I do wish to be a Christian."

"Now the Lord be praised! He has heard his servant's prayers," responded Dr. Marks fervently. "My study is open to you, my son, and my heart too," he added, taking Haldane's hand in both of his with a grasp that emphasized his cordial words. "Sit down by me here and tell me all that is on your mind."

This reception was so much kinder than he had even hoped that Haldane was deeply moved. The strong, genuine sympathy unsealed his lips, and in honest and impetuous words he told the whole story of his life since their last interview. The good doctor was soon fumbling for his handkerchief, and as the story culminated mopped his eyes and ejaculated "Poor fellow!" with increasing frequency.

"And now," concluded Haldane, "if I could only think that God would receive me as you have—if He would only change me from my miserable self to what I know I ought to be, and long to be—I feel that I could serve Him with gratitude and gladness the rest of my life, even though I should remain in the humblest station; and I have come to ask you what I am to do."

"He will receive you, my boy; He will receive you. No fears on that score," said the doctor, with a heartiness that carried conviction. "But don't ask me what to do. I'm not going to interfere in the Lord's work. He is leading you. If you wanted a text or doctrine explained I'd venture to give you my views, but in this vital matter I shall leave you in God's hands, 'being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.' I once set about reforming you myself, and you know what a bungle I made of it. Now I believe that the Lord has taken you in hand, and I shall not presume to meddle. Bow with me in prayer that He may speedily bring you into His marvellous light and knowledge." And the good man knelt, and spread his hands towards heaven, and prayed with the simplicity and undoubting faith of an ancient patriarch.

Was his faith contagious? Did the pathos of his voice, his strongly manifested sympathy, combine with all that had gone before to melt the young man's heart? Or, in answer to the prayer, was there present One whose province it is to give life? Like the wind that mysteriously rises and comes towards one with its viewless, yet distinctly felt, power, Haldane was conscious of influences at work in his heart that were as potent as they were incomprehensible. Fear and doubt were passing away. Deep emotions thrilled his soul. Nothing was distinct save a rush of feeling which seemed to lift him up as on a mighty tide, and bear him heavenward.

This was what he had sought; this was what he had hoped; this strong, joyous feeling, welling up in his heart like a spring leaping into the sunlight, must be conversion.

When he arose from his knees his eyes were full of tears, but a glad radiance shone through them, and, grasping the doctor's hand, he said brokenly,

"I believe your prayer has been answered; I never felt so strangely—so happy before."

"Come with me," cried the old man, impetuously, "come with me. Your mother must learn at once that her son, who was dead, is alive again;" and a few moments later Haldane was once more in the low carriage on his way, with the enthusiastic doctor, to his old home.

"We won't permit ourselves to be announced," said the child-like old clergyman, as they drove up the gravelled road; "we will descend upon your mother and sisters like an avalanche of happiness."

The curtains in the sitting-room were not drawn, and the family group was before them. The apartment was furnished with elegance and taste, but the very genius of dreariness seemed to brood over its occupants. The sombre colours of their mourning dresses seemed a part of the deep shadow that was resting upon them, and the depth and gloom of the shadow was intensified by their air of despondency and the pallor of their faces. The younger daughter was reading, but the elder and the mother held their hands listlessly in their laps, and their eyes were fixed on vacancy, after the manner of those whose thoughts are busy with painful themes.

Haldane could endure but a brief glance, and rushed in, exclaiming, "Mother, forgive me!"

His presence was so unexpected and his onset so impetuous that the widow had no time given her to consider what kind of a reception she ought to give her wayward son, of whom she had washed her hands.

Her mother-love triumphed; her heart had long been sore with grief, and she returned his embrace with equal heartiness.

His sisters, however, had inherited more of their mother's conventionality than of her heart, and the fact that this young man was their brother did not by any means obliterate from their minds the other facts, that he had a very bad reputation and that he was abominably dressed. Their greeting, therefore, was rather grave and constrained, and suggested that there might have been a death in the family, and that their brother had come home to attend the funeral.

But the unworldly Dr. Marks was wholly absorbed in the blessed truth that the dead was alive and the lost found. He had followed Haldane into the apartment, rubbing his hands, and beaming general congratulation. Believing that the serene light of Heaven's favour rested on the youth, he had forgotten that it would before society relaxed its dark frown. It seemed to him that it was an occasion for great and unmixed rejoicing.

After some brief explanations had been given to the bewildered household, the doctor said:

"My dear madam, I could not deny myself the pleasure of coming with your son, that I might rejoice with you. The Lord has answered our prayers, you see, and you have reason to be the happiest woman living."

"I am glad, indeed," sighed the widow, "that some light is beginning to shine through this dark and mysterious providence, for it has been so utterly dark and full of mystery that my faith was beginning to waver."

"The Lord will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able," said the clergyman heartily. "When relief is essential it comes, and it always will come, rest assured. Take comfort, madam; nay, let your heart overflow with joy without fear. The Lord means well by this young man. Take the unspeakable blessing He sends you with the gladness and gratitude of a child receiving gifts from a good Father's hands. Since life has begun the good work, He'll finish it."

"I hope so. I do, indeed, hope that Egbert will now come to his senses, and see things and duty in their true light, as other people do," ejaculated the widow fervently. "If he had only taken the excellent advice you first gave him here, how much better it would have been for us all! But now—" A dreary sigh closed the sentence.

"But now," responded the doctor, a little warmly, "the Lord has saved a soul from death, and that soul is your only son. It appears to me that this thought should swallow up every other, and it will when you realize it," he concluded heartily. "This world, and the fashion of it passeth away. Since all promises well for the world to come, you have only cause for joy. As for my excellent advice, I was better pleased with it at the time than the Lord was. I now am thankful that He let it do no more harm than it did."

"We cannot help the past, mother," said Haldane, eagerly, "let us turn our eyes to the future, which is all aglow with hope. I feel that God has forgiven me, and the thought fills my heart with a tumult of joy. Your warm embrace assures me that you have also forgiven the wrong and shame and sorrow you have received at my hands. Henceforth it shall be my life effort that you receive the reverse of all this. I at last feel within me the power to live as a true man ought."

"I trust your hopes may be realized, Egbert; I do indeed; but you were so confident before—and then we all know what followed," concluded his mother with a shudder.

"My present feelings, my present motives, in no respect resemble my condition when I started out before. I was then a concerted fool, ignorant of myself, the world, and the task I had attempted. But now I feel that all is different. Mother," he exclaimed with a rush of emotion, "I feel as if heaven had almost begun in my heart! why, then, do you cloud this bright hour with doubts and fears?"

"Well, my son, we will hope for the best," said his mother, endeavouring to throw off her despondency and share in the spirit which animated her pastor, "but I have dwelt so long in sorrow and foreboding that it will require time before I can recover my old natural tone. These sudden and strong alternations of feeling and action on your part puzzle and disquiet me, and I cannot see why one brought up as you have been should not maintain a quiet, well-bred deportment, and do right, as a matter of course, as your sisters do. And yet, if Dr. Marks truly thinks that you mean to do right from this time forward, I shall certainly take courage, though how we are going to meet what has already occurred I hardly see."

"I do, indeed, believe that your son intends to do right, and I also believe that the Lord intends to help him—which is of far greater consequence," said Dr. Marks. "I will now bid you good night, as to-morrow is the Sabbath; and let me entreat you, my dear madam, in parting, to further by your prayer and sympathy the good work which the Lord has begun."

Haldane insisted on seeing the old gentleman safely back to his study. Their ride was a rather quiet one, each being busy with his own thoughts. The good man had found his enthusiasm strangely quenched in the atmosphere in which