

## GENERAL LITERATURE.

## THE TWO ROADS.

A DREAM.

(From Sunday Stories by Archdeacon Wilberforce.)  
I HAD BEEN reading in the New Testament before I fell asleep, and the words I had read came back again to me in a dream.

I thought I stood upon the edge of a wide common, and that from every side people were crossing the common by many different paths, to a place where they all met just by my right hand. There were already a great number of people there when I first looked, and more and more kept coming there continually. They were of all sorts and ages, rich and poor, young and old, sickly and strong; and I wondered in my dream what it was that brought them all together.

Then I thought that I walked into the middle of the crowd, to see what they were about, and then I soon found what they were doing. I found that all the paths in which they had been walking, ended here in two different gates, and they were all doubling into which of these two gates they should enter;—so I looked at the gates with the rest, and cast my eyes down the paths which lay beyond them.

A great many people were going in at the first gate at which I looked, and I could not wonder that they were. It stood wide open, and seemed to bid all who chose to pass through it. And then the path upon which it opened looked as gay and as pleasant as a path could look. There was a bright gravel walk for those who liked it, running between beds of beautiful flowers; and a little on one side there was a smooth grass walk which ran amongst fine spreading trees, from whose green branches I thought every bird of the air was singing. There were benches placed here and there under those trees, where every one could sit when he was tired, and rich ripe fruits seemed to grow close by for them to eat, and close streams of water ran sparkling by, so that no one need be thirsty who could stoop down and drink. Then every one at first sight looked so cheerful and happy along the way. There were men and women singing and dancing, and there were children gathering flowers, and bright birds with silver feathers and golden eyes flew round and round; and the trees were all in flower, so that the air was quite scented with their smell, and bees hummed amongst the flowers, and the sun shone, and the rivulets danced, and all seemed alive and happy. I could not wonder for a moment that so many turned down this way.

Then I looked at the other gate, it was as narrow as the other was wide. It seemed indeed hardly wide enough to let any one pass, and so many found it. For I saw several who walked boldly up to it, and began to push in at it, but it caught the clothes of one, and the flesh of another, and the handle of a third, and they could not get through. I saw too, sometimes a mother with a child in her arms, it seemed she could not get through because of this child; and sometimes a father would hold a son's hand so fast, that neither could get in. What made this the stranger was, that in spite of its narrowness, every one was able to push in, who tried with all their might. There were some very large people who pressed in, whilst others who were only half their size were kept out. Sometimes a mother, after much study, would be willing to let go her child, rather than be kept without, and then it seemed to widen for them both, and they got in together. In a word it seemed wide enough to let in the largest with a struggle, and too narrow to let any in without; though children got in the easiest, and those who had fewest things to carry with them. Few bundles, indeed, were got in at all.

Nor were the troubles over when they had got by: the path was almost as narrow as the gate.

Instead of the smooth walks, and gay flowers, and bright sunshine of the other road, here the way was rough, and the tearing thorns grew very close to each side of the path; and there were many places in which it seemed to get altogether dark, so that no one would be able to keep clear of the thorns, on one side or the other.

When I saw all this, I wondered that any should try to enter into it, instead of all hurrying together down the gay and easy road.

But as I cast up my eyes, to my surprise I saw that there was a motto written over each, and I hastened to read them. That over the I gate was looking at said thus:—

The narrow gate and thorny way,  
Leads pilgrims to eternal day.

And then, casting my eyes upon the other, I read:—

This flowery way which men desire,  
Must end in everlasting fire.

Now when I had read these two mottoes, as I knew that the KING who had put them up was truth itself, I began to wonder how any could dare to go along the broad and easy way, though it did look so tempting; and I stopped to watch how it was that any dare do so.

The first I saw was a fine high-spirited young lad; who, when I first looked at him, was still holding his father's hand. The old man looked somewhat sad, and I could see that he was struggling hard to get him off and his son up the narrow gate. Just then there came by a party of merry young people, and they stretched out their gay hands to the poor boy, and looked into his face with their laughing eyes, and he slipped away from his father, and made with them towards the broad way. Just before he turned in, he looked round and said to his father, "I shall only go a little way with them, just to see what it is like, and then I shall turn back and follow you;" and then he passed into the green walk, and I could see him for a long way laughing and merry, but he never seemed to turn round again, and I never saw him come back.

As I looked, I saw many more turning in the same way; some because they could not get a bag of money through the narrow way, and could not bear to leave it; some because they were afraid of tearing their fine clothes in squeezing through; some because it looked so shewy all down the narrow way; and they longed to gather the flowers and the fruits with which the broad way was full: some from mere thoughtlessness, and some because those who were round them began to jeer at them as soon as they turned their eyes towards the narrow gate. Some, too, I saw who went in at the broad gate, because after walking a little way in the narrow road, they had got torn by the thorns which grew beside it.—These seemed the saddest of any; but they were always persuading every one to go in at the wide gate. "Trust us," they would say, showing the scratches upon their hands and cheeks, "trust us and be warned, for the path gets narrower and narrower, and narrower, and darker and darker, and if you are fools enough to enter, you will soon wish yourselves out as we did."

Now hearing this said by one another, made me look a little closer at the narrow way. Then I saw that those who set out on it, found mostly a few paces of easy walking just when they had squeezed through, and then that the path did get very narrow.

I heard one and another groan when the thorns tore his flesh, and there was hardly any one whom they did not tear sometimes. Those who got in young, as they passed the most easily through the gate, so they seemed to be getting on the best now they were in, and generally I could see that they who pressed on most earnestly found the way the easiest, and got the fewest rubs. But if any one began to loiter or to look back, he was in the thorns in a moment: and once in, no one could tell when they would get clear; for first they were torn on this side, and then on that; and even when they did get clear, they always seemed to enter on one of those dark places of the road through which they went sighing, and groaning, and stumbling, like men in a sore trouble and distress.

Many were so frightened by all this that they turned straight back and fled towards the narrow wicket, which then opened wide, and let them out too easily.

Now I had a great curiosity to see how these roads went on; and as I watched the walkers in the narrow road, I saw first that those who got on quickly were often looking down to a hook which they held in their hands, and then again looking up, as if to the heaven over their head. When first I saw one of them look down, I thought he would surely miss the track, and be in a moment in the thorns; but instead of this, it seemed as if he thus kept on straighter and quicker than ever. While I was musing upon this, I heard one of them read out of his book, "Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a lamp unto my paths." And another seemed to answer him at the moment by reading out—"Through thy commandments I got understanding, therefore I hate every evil way."

I saw too that instead of the way getting narrower, and more rough and thorny, it grew always easier, and smoother, and broader. To those who had come in young, it was very soon plain and pleasant; and though to the others it was longer to get, and they came here and there to a fresh set of thorns, yet it was plain that they got along much more easily than they had done. Some who had been always in the thorns on the one side or the other, were now walking steadily along; and some seemed almost flying, they moved so quickly by, and so easily. Flowers, too, began to blossom round them: the thorns turned often in to sweet bunches of roses and woodbine; clusters, too, of ripe grapes, of which they ate just enough to refresh their lips, hung here and there in their way; and the birds began to sing sweetly to them.

No one now talked of turning back, but busy as they seemed in pressing on, I thought they looked already happy: some indeed were joyous, and all were cheerful; and I overheard one and another sing cheerily, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

And now I could see but a little way before them, a bright and cheerful light which shone upon their road. As one and another entered into it, I lost sight of them; but I could hear by their last words which reached me, that they were then happier than ever. Some were singing holy songs, as if to the sound of harps and music of all kinds; some were nearly silent, but the little they did sing came from hearts full of joy; and I doubted not that what I could not see beyond was even happier and better than that I had seen.

I could scarcely bear to turn away my eyes from these happy people, to look at those who had chosen the other path; and when I did so, I was soon full of sorrow. For when I came to look more closely, I saw that even at the first, where they looked the merriest, there was hardly one amongst them who was thoroughly happy.—The mirth, too, which they had, died away as they went further. If one stooped to gather the fruit or the flowers, they faded away as soon as he had them in his hand, or turned into dust and ashes as soon as they reached his lips. The saddest of all were those who had once set out along the other road; they were ever turning round as if something frightened them, or else pushing on merrily as if they were running away from thought; and I could see, on looking closely, that the thorns still stuck in them and festered, and pricked them afresh at almost every turn. But though these were the saddest, yet as they went on, all grew sad. Gloom and darkness came over those faces which had been the merriest. They were also ever falling out with one another, and so making matters worse.

When I saw them all so sad, I wondered that none thought of turning back and trying the other road. I soon found out a cause for this: for just as I was looking, I saw one try to turn; and he, though he had been walking well and easily the other way, now I saw that he could scarcely stand. His feet slipped, his knees trembled, and he seemed all at once as weak as a young child: soon he slipped quite down; and as he lay bruised and groaning on the ground, those around him mocked and jeered him; and I thought he would have risen no more—when, lifting his eyes up to heaven, he seemed to call for help, and then just scrambling up on his hands and knees, he got a few steps further, only to fall again, and groan again for help. At last, however, his feet steadied, and I saw him after many hard struggles reach the gate and push through it, in spite of the crowd of people who were thronging in, and would scarce let him pass; and he fled to the narrow gate and pressed through it, and went along the path, though its thorns seemed to tear him at every step, and the way was darker than I had ever seen it yet; but still he pressed on like a man flying for his life; and I never took my eyes off him till at last he got into the easier and lightsome stage of his journey.

But for the rest who did not turn, it was a heart-breaking thing to look at them. For sooner or later they all got into thick black darkness, which was now spread all over what had once been their gay and cheerful road; and then I could see that they were parted from their friends, though they were most afraid of being alone; and then I knew that some worse thing befell them; for though I saw them not, I heard their cries and screams.—They were exceeding loud and bitter, but they