

PAUL BROWN'S DIFFICULTY.

"Good morning, Deacon Curtis," said his invalid pastor, as the kind visitor entered his chamber. "I am very glad to see you; I was particularly wishing that you would come in to-day."

"Good morning, sir," was the ready response; "what can I do for you?"

"I want to ask you, Deacon, about our young friend, Paul Brown. Since I have had the trial of being laid upon my back in the midst of this precious revival, and have been obliged to commit the pastoral care of my people to a stranger, I have feared that some timid souls might be overlooked. I have thought particularly of Paul Brown, whom I have understood to be in earnest concern for his salvation during many days; and yet I cannot learn that he is making any progress. He is shy and reserved; I fear that some difficulty is keeping him away from Christ.

"I do not know of any especial hindrance sir, he doesn't speak of any. He comes to all our meetings, and I am told that he is very diligent in reading the Bible at his boarding-place. I suppose he will come out bright by-and-by. We can not force the matter, you know, pastor."

"You mean, I suppose, that we cannot dictate to God in the exercise of his sovereignty. That is true, 'He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy.' But he has declared it his purpose to show mercy to those who penitently seek it; and if we can help our fellow sinners thus to seek salvation, it is surely both our privilege and duty. In the matter of earnest endeavour 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' Deacon, I must see Paul Brown at once. Will you ask him to come in?"

"If you think it will not hurt you to talk with him I will. But I fear you are not well enough for the exertion."

"It will hurt me less to see him than to bear him on my mind so painfully as I have done this morning. I must know what his trouble is, if possible."

The faithful messenger soon delivered his errand. But Paul Brown was not easily persuaded to an interview with his pastor. "He is sick and ought not to be troubled," he said. "Besides, Deacon, it's of no use to try any more; I am about discouraged.

It isn't likely the minister can tell me anything better than the Bible does; and I've read that pretty constantly for a fortnight now."

"He may make the meaning a little plainer though, neighbour Brown; and he seemed so troubled about you, perhaps you had better see him. He will be worried, I am sure, if you refuse to go."

At that idea Paul's reluctance vanished, and he was soon beside the sick bed of the waiting pastor. The inquiries of the latter were most direct and simple. "What is keeping you away from Christ, my friend? Do you not know that he is able and willing to save you?"

"Not more willing than I am to be saved, I am sure of that, sir," was the answer.

"Well Jesus says, 'Come unto me and be ye saved—why do you stay away?'"

"Ah, sir, that 'coming' is just the thing that troubles me; I don't know how to do it."

"Have you asked the Saviour to show you how?"

"If you mean praying, sir, I have not done that."

"Do you tell me that you have not prayed for your own salvation?"

"Surely I dared not pray; for the Bible itself declares that 'the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.'"

"You greatly mistake the intent of that Scripture, if you suppose it means to forbid prayer to an anxious sinner. God does not so mock our necessities. His ear is open to the faintest cry of those who would seek his face. In all the guilt of our impotence, Jesus so loved us as to die for us. Think you that when he sees us turning towards him he would frown us away? No, my friend; He is waiting to be gracious—come to him and live."

"How shall I come?"

"Ask Jesus to show you how. If you have never prayed, this is the time and place. Get on your knees before God, and tell him your trouble. In the name of his dear Son ask him help."

Paul Brown followed his pastors counsel. He felt himself a sinner—he wanted to find pardon and peace—he believed Jesus was able and willing to bless him; and like a trusting child he laid the case before him. God was not slack concerning his promises.