

Slaying the Dragon.

BY MRS. D. O. CLARK.

CHAPTER II.

PRECEPT AND PRACTICE

That same night Erastus Dow was stricken with delirium tremens, and for weeks his life hung trembling in the balance. A strong constitution triumphed over the disease and he came back slowly to convalescence. Feeling softened by this terrible experience, and quite ready to make good resolutions for the future, he sent for his minister to come and talk with him.

"I'm a hard lookin' cove, parson," said Rast, as the minister entered the humble cottage. "My craft come purty near goin' to the bottom, but I rather guess I shall float this time."

"My unfortunate friend," replied Mr. Felton, "give God the glory for your marvellous recovery. He has given you one more opportunity to repent, and woe be unto you if you do not embrace it. I am truly sorry to find you so low down in the gutter, and trust that the terrible experience through which you have just passed, which was heaven's just penalty for your sin, may work in you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. I hope you have sent for me in order to converse upon religious themes."

Dow looked upon the stately minister, clad in the richest broadcloth, with feelings akin to awe. But the polished language which came from those lips conveyed but little meaning to his beclouded brain, and he stared vacantly at the speaker.

"Mr. Felton wants to know why you've sent for him," interposed Phoebe, seeing her husband's look of perplexity.

"Wal, you see, parson," said the man, plucking nervously at the bedclothes, "sense I've ben lyin' here I've thought of a good many things, an' one was that drink want the best thing fur me."

"You are right there, Erastus," said the minister emphatically. "It is very evident that you have a natural craving for alcohol. You have indulged this appetite until it has become your master, and you are its slave. There is no course open to you now but abstinence, total, entire. You must not allow another drop to pass your lips unless you desire to have a recurrence of delirium tremens. The doctor says you cannot survive another attack."

The sick man shuddered at the minister's closing words. "I'd do most anything," parson, rather than live over the last few weeks. No one knows what I've suffered only those es has had the tremens. There's ben many a night when Tom Kinmon an' Tyler Matthews had all they could do ter keep me on the bed. There were snakes a-crawlin' over the bed an' winding themselves round my neck. An' then there was a horrible lookin' beast, like pictures I've seen of dragons, an' it kept comin' nearer an' nearer till I would struggle an' scream from fright, an' then the monster would creep away only to come back agin ez soon ez it was dark."

"Ugh!" and Rast shuddered as he recalled these painful scenes, and placed his hands over his eyes as though to blot out the sight from his memory.

"Rather than hav the tremens again, parson," he continued, "I'd leave off drinkin', an' sign the pledge. I hev thought the matter over a good deal since I've been lying here, an' Phoebe, she said so much ter me about signin' off, that I thought I'd talk it over with you an' git your advice."

"O my husband, my husband!" sobbed Phoebe, falling on her knees, and burying her face in the bedclothes. "You will be a saved man if you will only do this. We will be happy again, and perhaps our Jamie will return to us, and we will teach him better things."

The sight of his wife's emotion moved Rast to tears. "Poor Jamie!" he whispered, "ef I'd hev set him a good example, he'd never hev grown up sech a wild cove. Wal, parson, what d'yer think?"

"Erastus, no one could more heartily approve your plan than do I. You have a natural appetite for alcohol, and you have indulged this appetite to an alarming extent. Your will has become enfeebled, and no longer rules. It is chained—the slave of your appetite. The only safe course open to you, is abstinence. If signing 'the pledge' will help you to keep your resolutions, I see no objection to your taking it. Your case is an extreme one, therefore extreme measures must be used. Still, you must bear in mind, Erastus, that your help lies in God—not in a pledge. If you do not look to him for strength, you will surely fall."

Rast drank in with eagerness every word which the minister uttered. Resolution was written on his countenance, and already the dawn of a new mazzhood shone in his eyes.

"Couldn't you draw me up a pledge on a piece of paper?" he inquired, after a moment's silence.

"Thank God! Thank God!" cried Phoebe, with streaming eyes.

"Certainly, Erastus," said the minister, and taking a slip of paper from his note-book, he wrote these words:

"God helping me, I will drink no more intoxicating liquor as a beverage."

"Signed."

"Put your name right after the word signed," said Mr. Felton, handing paper and pencil to the fisherman. With trembling fingers the drunkard wrote his name as he had been directed.

"Now, parson," he said, handing the paper to Mr. Felton, "jest put your name down alongside of mine, so es ter make a kind of contract between us. 'Twill help me lots, I know. The fellers at the Maypole hev sed lots of hard things about you, but I've never b'leaved a word on't. If you sign this paper with me, it'll stop all the tongues in Falport thet's been blowin' es how you loved wine better than souls. Come now, parson, will you do it?"

The Rev. Phineas drew back haughtily, at this uncouth proposal, and did not deign to see the paper which was held out for his signature.

"My friend," he began, "you have entirely mistaken the meaning of my words, if you have conceived the idea that I advocated total abstinence for everybody. Far from it. Total abstinence and the pledge system are extreme measures to be employed only in extreme cases. When a man gets into that condition where his will power is gone, and all his strength of character is gone, too, then these outside influences may come in to act as props until the man can once more stand alone. You, Erastus, have come to this deplorable state through over indulgence. I advise you to adopt total abstinence for the reason specified. It is the only safe course open to you. On the other hand, I am strong, judicious in the indulgence of appetite, and use moderation in all things. Our cases are as far removed as the opposite poles of the battery. Why should I, then, who feel no need of restriction, sign away my moral liberty?"

"Because a weaker brother, one for whom Christ died, asks you who are strong, to help him conquer the demon within him. He asks you, I ask you, in God's name, to stretch forth your hand, and help lift him from the pit into which he has fallen. Dare you refuse, you who are Christ's servant, you who stand in Christ's stead, entreating men to come back to God? Dare you, I say?" and Phoebe clutched at the minister's sleeve in the frenzy of despair.

"Woman," said Mr. Felton, sternly, "you are beside yourself, or you would not address such language to me. Yes, I dare follow in the footsteps of my Master. He came eating and drinking. He preached moderation, and condemned gluttony. So do I. You beg your husband's salvation of me. God alone can create in him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him. I will gladly stretch forth my hand and lift him from the depths if I can do this without sacrificing a principle of my being. When you ask impossibilities, I can but refuse."

Erastus Dow's face had been slowly darkening during Mr. Felton's speech. When the minister had finished, he broke forth in a sullen tone:

"Es near es I ken make out, parson, total abstinence ain't ter be found in the Bible, and mod'rate drinkin' is. 'Fraps you ricollect jest quotin' some Scripeter which sed es how a leetle wine was good when it want abused. How is it, parson? Does the Bible back up your views?"

"It does not," cried Phoebe, with blanched lips, as she realized whither her husband's thoughts were drifting. "The Bible says, 'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red: when it giveth its colour in the cup: when it moveth itself aright: at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.' Believe me, Erastus, this is God's truth. It is the truth your mother taught you when you were a child. All other reasoning is from the evil one."

Rast still kept his eyes fastened upon the minister's face.

"Which of you is right, parson?" he said, at length.

"Erastus," replied Mr. Felton, "what I have said, I have said. I cannot again repeat my line of argument. I fear you are talking simply for the sake of argument, and time spent this way is lost time."

"Do you git your argyment out the Bible?" persisted the fisherman.

"Certainly."

As quick as a flash, Rast tore his pledge into pieces, and scattered the bits of paper on the floor.

"Phoebe, d'yer hear? The Bible upholds mod'rate drinkin', and the parson practices it. D'yer think I'm going ter set myself up ter be better'n them? No sir, you bet I don't! I'll be a mod'rate drinker. It's good company I'm in, wife."

Mrs. Dow burst into passionate weeping, and the clergyman took his hat, and prepared to leave.

"Erastus Dow," he said, sternly, "I forbid you using such abusive language in my presence. You have wholly misconstrued my words and reviled my counsels. I will now leave you. If at some future time you should desire spiritual help, I shall be sincerely glad to impart it. I trust you may soon be in your right mind."

As he left the room, Mrs. Dow turned upon him such a look of reproach and anguish, as haunted the worthy divine for many a day.

"You need not troubles to come again," she said. "It v be of no avail."

(To be continued.)

LESSON NOTES.

THIRD QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.

LESSON IV.—JULY 22.

PETER'S CONFESSION AND CHRIST'S REBUKE.

Matt. 16. 13-26. Memory verses, 24-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.—Matt. 16. 24.

OUTLINE.

1. Wrong Conceptions of our Lord's Mission, v. 13, 14.
2. The Right Conception of Our Lord's Mission, v. 15-20.
3. Our Lord Foretells His Death, v. 21-23.
4. The Terms of Discipleship, v. 24-26. Time—A.D. 29. Place.—Near to Caesarea Philippi.

LESSON HELPS.

14. "John the Baptist"—Who had been put to death by Herod, and was believed to have risen again. "Elias"—The prophet Elijah, who was expected to appear before the coming of the Messiah, because of some mystical words of the prophet Malachi. "Jeremias"—The prophet Jeremias, who, superstitious Jews believed, was to come to earth again.

16. "The Christ"—That is, "the Messiah." "The Son of the living God"—Not "one of the sons of God."

17. "Bar-Jona"—Son of Jonah. "Flesh and blood"—No merely human teaching or knowledge could have produced this thought.

18. "Upon this rock"—The testimony of Jesus; the truth of Jesus' Messiahship. "Build my church"—The first mention of the church as separate from the synagogue. "Gates of hell"—The gate stands as the symbol of power.

19. "Keys"—Power and authority. "Bind on earth . . . bound in heaven"—A parallel passage shows that the other apostles were included in this general grant of authority. "To bind is to impose an obligation as binding; to loose is to declare a precept not binding."—Bishop Merrill.

20. "Tell no man"—Because the truth could not be understood as yet, and the apostles themselves were not yet sufficiently instructed to preach the doctrine.

24. "If any man will come"—That is, "If any man chooses to come." "After me"—Jesus was going to his throne and crown, but by way of ignominy and death. "Let him deny himself"—Self is Christ's chief and most cherished rival in every heart; and devotion to self, instead of to Christ, is the very soul and

essence of men's sins. Hence self-denial is the first step toward true discipleship.—Curry.

HOME READINGS

- M. Peter's confession.—Matt. 16. 13-20.
- Tu. Christ's Rebuke.—Matt. 16. 21-28.
- W. Another confession.—John 6. 66-71.
- Th. True confession.—1 John 4. 1-6.
- F. The corner stone.—1 Pet. 2. 1-10.
- S. The sure foundation.—Eph. 2. 11-22.
- Su. For Christ's sake.—Phil. 3. 1-11.

QUESTIONS FOR HOME STUDY.

1. Wrong Conceptions of Our Lord's Mission, v. 13, 14. At what place were Christ and his disciples? What question did he ask of them? Why did he ask this question? What was their answer? What did he term himself?
2. The Right Conception of Our Lord's Mission, v. 15-20. How further does Christ question his disciples? Who answered him? What was his answer? How did Christ address him? Whom did Christ say had revealed it unto him? How could this be? To what did he liken Peter? What is a rock the symbol of? Upon what was the church to be built?
3. Our Lord Foretells His Death, v. 21-23. For what great sorrow does Christ try to prepare his disciples? What was he to suffer? At whose hands? Who protested against it? How did Christ rebuke him? Why was the Lord's death necessary? What does it teach?
4. The Terms of Discipleship, v. 24-26. What is necessary for true discipleship? Golden Text. Who fixed the standard? What was the custom of those condemned to die by crucifixion? What do you understand by "denying one's self and taking up the cross" in these days?

PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.

- Where in this lesson do we learn—
1. That Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God?
 2. That we cannot be followers of Jesus without giving ourselves entirely to him?
 3. That to gain the whole world and lose one's own soul would be to lose everything?

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