

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.—MR. GROWTHER FEELS AN ANCIENT GRUDGE.

The problem in regard to the future of St. Paul's Church, which had so greatly burdened Dr. Barstow, was substantially solved. Christ had obtained control of the preacher's heart, and henceforth would not be a dogma, but a living presence, in his sermons. The Pharisees of old could not keep the multitudes from Him, though their motives for following Him were often very mixed. Although the philosophical Christ of theology, whom Dr. Barstow had ably preached, could not change the atmosphere of St. Paul's, the Christ of the Bible, the Man of sorrows, the meek and lowly Nazarene, could, and the masses would be tempted to feel that they had a better right in a place sacred to His worship than those who resembled Him in spirit as little as they did in the pomp of their life.

There would be friction at first, and some serious trouble. Mr. Arnot's judgment was correct, and some of the "first-class saints" (in their own estimation) would be "blown out of their pews." St. Paul's would eventually cease to be the fashionable church par excellence, and this fact alone would be good and sufficient reason for a change on the part of some who intend to be select in their associations on earth, whatever relations with the "mixed multitude" they may have to endure in Heaven. But the warm-hearted and true-hearted would remain; and every church grows stronger as the Pharisees depart and the publicans and sinners enter.

The congregation that gathered at the evening service of the memorable Sabbath described in the previous chapter was prophetic. Many of the wealthy and aristocratic members were absent, either from habit or disgust. Haldane, Mr. Growther, and many who in some respects resembled them, were present. "Jeems," the discriminating sexton, had sagaciously guessed that the wind was about to blow from another quarter, and was veering round also, as fast as he deemed it prudent. "Ordinary persons" received more than ordinary attention, and were placed within ear-shot of the speaker.

But the problem of poor Haldane's future was not clear by any means. It is true a desire to live a noble life had been kindled in his heart, but as yet it was but little more than a good impulse, an aspiration. In the fact that his eyes had been turned questioning and hopefully towards the only One who has ever been able to cope with the mystery of evil there was rich promise; but just what this divine Friend could do for him he understood as little as did the fishermen of Galilee. They looked for temporal change and glory; he was looking for some vague and marvellous spiritual change and exaltation.

But the Sabbath passed, and he remained his old self. Hoping, longing for the change did not produce it.

It was one of Mr. Growther's peculiarities to have a fire upon the hearth, even when the evenings were so warm as not to require it. "Might as well kinder get ourselves used to heat," he would growl when Haldane remonstrated.

After the evening service they both lowered at the fire for some time in silence.

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," had been Dr. Barstow's text, and, as is usually the case, the necessity of conversion had been made clearer than just what conversion is; and many more than the disquieted occupants of the quaint old kitchen had been sent home sorely perplexed how to set about the simple task of "believing." But it was a happy thing for all that they had been awakened to the fact that something must be done. After that sermon none could delude themselves with the hope that being decorous, well-dressed worshippers as St. Paul's would be all that was required.

But Mr. Growther needed no argument on this subject, and he had long believed that his only chance was, as he expressed it, "such an out-and-out shakin' to pieces, and makin' over again that I wouldn't know myself." Then he would rub his rheumatic legs despondingly and add, "But my spiritual joints have got as stiff and dry as these old walkin' puns, and when I try to git up some good sort o' feelin' it's like pumpin' of a dry pump. I only feel real hearty when I'm a cus'in'. A-ah!"

But the day's experience and teaching had awakened anew in his breast, as truly as in Haldane's, the wish that he could be converted, whatever that blessed and mysterious change might be; and so, with his wrinkled face seamed with deeper and more complex lines than usual, the poor old soul stared at the fire, which was at once the chief source of his comfort and the emblem of that which he most dreaded. At last he snarled,

"I'm a blasted old fool for goin' to meetin' and gittin' all riled up so. Here, I haven't had a comfortable doze to-day, and I shall be kicking around all night with nuthin' runnin' in my head but 'Except ye be converted, except ye be converted.' I wish I had as good a chance of being converted as I have of 'sin' struck by lightning'."

"I wish I needed conversion as little as you," said Haldane, despondingly.

"Now, look here," snapped the old man, "I'm in no mood for any nonsense to-night. I want you to know I've never been converted, and I can prove it to you plaguier quick if you stroke me agin' the fur. You've got the advantage of me in this business, though you have been a hard cuss, for you are young and kind o' limber yet." Then, as he glanced at the discouraged youth, his manner changed, and in a tone that was meant to be kindly he added, "There, there! Why don't you pluck up heart? If I was as young as you I'd get converted if it took me all summer."

Haldane shook his head, and after a moment slowly and

musingly said, as much to himself as to the giver of this good advice,

"I'm in the Slough of Despond, and I don't know how to get out. I can see the sunny uplands that I long to reach, but everything is quaking and giving way under my feet. After listening to Dr. Barstow's grand sermon this morning, my spirit flamed up hopefully. Now he has placed a duty directly in my path that I cannot perform by myself. Mrs. Arnot has made it clear to me that the manhood I need is Christian manhood. Dr. Barstow proves out of the Bible that the first step towards this is conversion—which seems to be a mysterious change which I but vaguely understand. I must do my part myself, he says, yet I am wholly dependent on the will and co-operation of another. Just what am I to do? Just when and how will the help come in? How can I know that it will come? or how can I ever be sure that I have been converted?"

"Oh, stop splittin' hairs!" said Mr. Growther, testily; "Hanged if I can tell you how it's all going to be brought about—go ask the parson to clear up these points for you—but I can tell you this much: when you get converted you'll know it. If you had a ragin' toothache, and it suddenly stopped, and you felt comfortable all over, wouldn't you know it? But that don't express it. You'd feel more'n comfortable; you'd feel so good you couldn't hold in. You'd be fur shoutin'; you wouldn't know yourself. Why, doesn't the Bible say you'd be a new critter? There'll be just such a change in your heart as there is in this old kitchen when we come in on a cold, dark night, and light the candles, and kindle a fire. I tell you what 'is, young man: if you once get converted your troubles will be well nigh over."

Though the picture of this possible future was drawn in such homely lines, Haldane looked at it with wistful eyes. He had become accustomed to his benefactor's odd ways and words, and caught his sense beneath the grotesque imagery. As he was then situated, the future drawn by the old man and interpreted by himself was peculiarly attractive. He was very miserable, and it is most natural, especially for the young, to wish to be happy. He had been led to believe that conversion would lead to a happiness as great as it was mysterious—a sort of miraculous ecstasy, that would render him oblivious of the hard and prosaic conditions of his lot. Through misfortune and his own fault he possessed a very defective character. This character had been formed, it is true, by years of self-indulgence and wrong, and Mrs. Arnot had asserted that reform would require long, patient and heroic effort. Indeed, she had suggested that in fighting and subduing the evils of one's own nature a man attained the noblest degree of knighthood. He had already learned how severe was the conflict in which he had been led to engage.

But might not this mysterious conversion make things infinitely easier? If a great and radical change were suddenly wrought in his moral nature, would not evil appetites and propensities be uprooted like vile weeds? If a "new heart" were given him, would not the thoughts and desires flowing from it be like pure water from an unsullied spring? After the "old things," that is the evil, had passed away, would not that which was noble and good spring up naturally, and almost spontaneously?

This was Mr. Growther's view, and he had long since learned that the old man's opinions were usually sound on most questions. This seemed to him, then, the teaching of the Bible, also, and of such sermons as he could recall. And yet it caused him some misgivings that Mrs. Arnot had not indicated more clearly this short cut out of his difficulties.

But Mr. Growther's theology carried the day. As he watched the young man's thoughtful face, he thought the occasion ripe for the "word in season."

"Now is the time," he said, "now, while yer moral joints is limber. What's the use of climbing the mountain on your hands and knees when you can go up in a chariot of fire, if you can only git in it?" and he talked and urged so earnestly that Haldane smiled and said,

"Mr. Growther, you have mistaken your vocation. You ought to have been a missionary to the heathen."

"That would be sendin' a thief to kitch a thief. But yer know I've a grudge agin' the devil, if I do belong to him, and if I could help git you out of his clutches, it would do me a sight o' good."

"If I ever do get out I shall indeed have to thank you."

"I don't want no thanks, and don't deserve any. You're only givin' me a chance to hit the adversary 'twixt the eyes," and the old man added his characteristic "A-ah!" in an emphatic and vengeful manner, as if he would like to hit very hard.

Human nature was on the side of Mr. Growther's view of conversion. Nothing is more common than the delusive hope that health, shortened by years of wilful wrong, can be regained by the use of some highly extolled drug, or by a few deep draughts from some far-famed spring.

Haldane retired to rest fully bent upon securing this vague and mighty change as speedily as possible.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.—HOPING FOR A MIRACLE.

Mr. Ivison, Haldane's employer, was a worshipper at St. Paul's, and, like many others, had been deeply impressed by the sermon. Its influence had not wholly exhaled by Monday, and, as this gentleman was eminently practical, he felt that he ought to do something, as well as experience a little emotion. Thus he was led to address the following note to Haldane:

"Last week I gave you a chance; this week I am induced to give you a good word. While I warn you that I will tolerate no weak dallying with your old temptations, I also tell you that I would like to see you make a man of yourself, or more correctly, perhaps, as Dr. Barstow would express it, be made a man of. If one wants to do right, I believe there is help for him (go and ask the Rev. Dr. Barstow about this); and if you will go right straight ahead till I see you can be depended upon, I will continue to speak good words to you and for you, and perhaps do more."

"GEORGE IVISON."

This note greatly encouraged Haldane, and made his precarious foothold among the world's industries seem more firm and certain. The danger of being swept back into the deep water where those struggle who have no foothold, no work, no place in society, would not come from the caprice or forgetfulness of his employer, but from his own peculiar temptations and weaknesses. If he could patiently do his duty in his present humble position, he justly believed that it would be the stepping-stone to something better. But having learned to know himself, he was afraid of himself; and he had seen with an infinite dread what cold, dark depths yawn about one whom society shakes off as a vile and venomous thing, and who must eventually take evil and its consequences as his only portion. The hot, reeking apartment wherein he toiled was the first solid ground that he had felt beneath his feet for many days. If he could hold that footing the water might shoal so that he could reach the land. It is true he could always look to his mother for food and clothing if he would comply with her conditions. But, greatly perverted as his nature had been, food and clothing, the maintenance of a merely animal life, could no longer satisfy him. He had thought too deeply, and had seen too much truth, to feed contentedly among the swine.

But the temptations which eventually lead to the swine—could he persistently resist these? Could he maintain a hard, monotonous routine of toil, with no excitements, no pleasures, with nothing that even approached happiness? He dared not give way; he doubted his strength to go forward alone with such a prospect. If conversion be a blessed miracle, by which a debased nature is suddenly lifted up, and a harsh, lead-coloured, prosaic world transfigured into the vestibule of heaven, he longed to witness it in his own experience.

It was while he was in this mood that his thoughts recurred to Dr. Marks, the good old clergyman who had been the subject of his rude, practical joke months before. He recalled the sincere, frank letter which led to their evening interview, and remembered with a thrill of hope the strong and mysterious emotion that had seized upon him as the venerable man took his hand in his warm grasp, and said in tones of pathos that shook his soul, "I wish I could lead you by loving force into the paths of pleasantness and peace." Wild and reckless fool as he then was, it had been only by a decided effort and abrupt departure that he had escaped the heavenly influences which seemed to brood in the quiet study where the good man prayed and spun the meshes of the net which he daily cast for souls. If he could visit that study again with a receptive heart, might not the emotion that he had formerly resisted rise like a flood, and sweep away his old, miserable self, and he become in truth a "new creature?"

The thought, having been once entertained, speedily grew into a hope, and then became almost a certainty. He felt that he would much rather see Dr. Marks than Dr. Barstow, and that if he could feel that kind, warm grasp again an impulse might be given him which even Mrs. Arnot's wise and gentle words could not inspire.

Before the week was over he felt that something must be done either to soften his hard lot or to give him strength to endure it.

The men, boys and girls who worked at his side in the mill were in their natures like their garb, coarse and soiled. They resented the presence of Haldane for a two-fold reason: they regarded the intrusion of a "gao'-bird" among them in the light of an insult; they were still more annoyed, and perplexed also, that this disreputable character made them feel that he was their superior. Hence a system of petty persecution grew up. Epithets were flung at him, and practical jokes played upon him, till his heart boiled with anger or his nerves were irritated to the last degree of endurance. More than once his fist was clenched to strike, but he remembered in time that the heavier the blow he struck the more disastrously it would re-act against himself.

After the exasperating experiences and noise of the day, Mr. Growther's cottage was not the quiet refuge he needed. Mr. Growther's growl was chronic, and it rasped on Haldane's over-strained nerves like the filing of a saw. Dr. Barstow's sermons of the previous Sabbath had emphatically "riled" the old gentleman, and their only result, apparently, was to make him more out-of-sorts and vindictive towards his poor, miserable little self than ever. He was so irascible that even the comfortable cat and dog became aware that something unusual was amiss, and, instead of dozing securely, they learned to keep a wary and deprecatory eye on their master and the toes of his thick-soled slippers.

"I have been goin' on like a darned old porkerpin," he said to Haldane one evening, "and if you don't git converted soon you'd better git out of my way. If you was as meek as Moses and twir as good you couldn't stand me much longer;" and the poor fellow felt that there was considerable truth in the remark.

The mill closed at an earlier hour on Saturday afternoon, and he determined to visit Dr. Marks if he could obtain permission from his employer to be absent a few hours on Monday morning. He wrote a note to Mr. Ivison, cordially thanking him for his encouraging words, but adding, frankly, that he could make no promises in regard to himself. "All that I can say," he wrote, "that I am trying to do right now, and that I am grateful to you for the chance you have given me. I wish to get the 'help' you suggest in your note to me, but, in memory of certain relations to my old pastor, Dr. Marks, I would rather see him than Dr. Barstow, and if you will permit me to be absent a part of next Monday forenoon I will esteem it a great favour, and will trespass on your kindness no further. I can go after mill-hours on Saturday, and will return by the first train on Monday."

Mr. Ivison readily granted the request, and even became somewhat curious as to the result.

(To be continued.)

Two Arctic Polar expeditions are in course of organization, one in America and the other in England.