

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

BY REV. E. P. ROE, AUTHOR OF "FROM JEST TO EARNEST."

## CHAPTER XLII.—Continued.

Poor Mrs. Haldane seemed destined to be her son's evil genius to the end. When people take a false view of life there seems a fatality in all their actions. The very fact that they are not in accord with what is right and true causes the most important steps of their lives to appear ill-timed, injudicious and unnatural. That they are well-meaning and sincere does not help matters much, if both tact and sound principle are wanting. Mrs. Haldane belonged to the class that are sure that everything is right which seems right to them. True, it was a queer little jumble of religious prejudices and conventional notions that combined to produce her conclusions; but when once they were reached, no matter how absurd or defective they appeared to others, she had no more doubt concerning them than of the Copernican system.

Her motherly feelings had made her willing to take her son to some hiding-place in Europe; but since that could not be, and perhaps was not best, she had thoroughly settled in her own mind that he should accept of her offer and live at her expense the undemonstrative life of an oyster in the social and moral ooze of the obscurest mud-bank he could find. In this way the terrible world might be led to eventually leave off talking and thinking of the Haldane family—a consummation that appeared to her worth any sacrifice. When the morning paper brought another vile story (copied from the "Hillaton Courier") of her son's misdoings, her adverse view of his plans and character was confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt. She felt that there was a fatality about the place and its associations for him, and her one hope was to get him away.

She cut the article from the paper and enclosed it to him with the accompanying note:

"We go to New York this afternoon, and sail for Europe to-morrow. You send us in parting a characteristic souvenir which I return to you. The scenes and associations indicated in this disgraceful paragraph seem more to your taste than those which your family have hitherto enjoyed as their right for many generations. While this remains true, you, of necessity, cut yourself off from your kindred, and we, who are most closely connected, must remain where our names cannot be associated with yours. I still cherish the hope, however, that you may find the way of the transgressor so hard that you will be brought by your bitter experience to accept of my offer and give the world a chance to forget your folly and wickedness. When you will do this in good faith (and my lawyer will see that it is done in good faith), you may draw on him for the means of a comfortable support.

"In bitter shame and sorrow, your mother,

"EMILY HALDANE."

This letter was a severe blow to her son, for it contained the last words of the mother that he might not see for years. While he felt it to be cruelly unjust to him and his present aims, he was calm enough now to see that the distorted paragraph which led to it fitted in only too well with the past, and so had the colouring of truth. When inclined to blame his mother for not waiting for his versions of these miserable events and accepting of them alone, he was compelled to remember that she was in part awakened from her blind idolatry of him by the discovery of his efforts to deceive her in regard to his increasing dissipation. Even before he had entered Mr. Arnot's counting-room he had taught her to doubt his word, and now she had evidently lost confidence in him utterly. He foresaw that this confidence could only be regained by years of patient well-doing, and that she might incline to believe in him more slowly even than comparative strangers. But he was not disposed to be very angry and resentful, for he now had but little confidence in himself. He had been led, however, by his bitter experience, and by Mrs. Arnot's faithful ministry, to adopt that lady's brief but comprehensive creed. He was learning to trust in Christ as an all-powerful and personal friend; he was daily seeking to grasp the principles which Christ taught, but more clearly acted out, and which are essential to the formation of a noble character. He had thus complied with the best conditions of spiritual growth, and the crude elements of his character, which had been rendered more chaotic by evil, slowly began to shape themselves into the symmetry of a true man.

In regard to his mother's letter, all that he could do was to enclose to her, with the request that it be forwarded, Mr. Iverson's defence of him, which appeared in the "Courier" of the following morning.

"You perceive," he wrote, "that a stranger has taken pains to inform himself correctly in regard to the facts of the case, and that he has for me some charity and hope. I do not excuse the wrong of my action on that occasion or on any other, but I do wish, and I am trying, to do better, and I hope to prove the same to you by years of patient effort. I may fail miserably, however, as you evidently believe. The fact that my folly and wickedness have driven you and my sisters into exile, is a very great sorrow to me, but compliance with your request that I should leave Hillaton and go into hiding would bring no remedy at all. I know that I should go worse anywhere else, and my self-respect and conscience both require that I should fight the battle of my life out here, where I have suffered such disgraceful defeat."

## CHAPTER XLIII.—MR. GROWTHER "STUMPED."

About three weeks after the occasion upon which Haldane's human nature had manifested itself in such a disastrous manner, as he had supposed, Mrs. Arnot, Dr. Barstow and Mr. Iverson happened to find themselves together at an evening company.

"I have been wishing to thank you, Mr. Iverson," said the lady, "for your just and manly letter in regard to young Haldane. I think it encouraged him very much, and has

given him more hopefulness in his work. How has he been doing of late? The only reply he makes to my questioning is, 'I am plodding on.'"

"Do you know," said Mr. Iverson, "I am beginning to take quite an interest in that young fellow. He has genuine pluck. You cannot understand, Mrs. Arnot, what an ordeal he has passed through. He is naturally as mettlesome as a young colt, and yet, day after day, he was subjected to words and actions that were to him like the cut of a whip."

"Mr. Iverson," said Mrs. Arnot, with a sudden moisture coming into her eyes. "I have long felt the deepest interest in this young man. In judging anyone I try to consider not only what he does, but all the circumstances attending upon his action. Knowing Haldane's antecedents, and how peculiarly unfitted he was, by early life and training, for his present trials, I think his course, since he was last released from prison, has been very brave;" and she gave a brief sketch of his life and mental states, as far as a delicate regard for his feelings permitted, from that date.

Dr. Barstow, in his turn, also became interested, not only in the youth for his own sake, but also in the workings of his mind and his spiritual experiences. It was the good doctor's tendency to analyze everything, and place all psychological manifestations under their proper theological heads.

"I feel that I indirectly owe this youth a large debt of gratitude, since his coming to our church, and his repulse, in the first instance, has led to decided changes for the better in us all, I trust. But his experience, as you have related it, raises some perplexing questions. Do you think he is a Christian?"

"I do not know. I think he is," replied Mrs. Arnot.

"When do you think he became a Christian?"

"Still less can I answer that question definitely."

"But would not one naturally think it was when he was conscious of that happy change in the study of good old Dr. Marks?"

"Poor Haldane has been conscious of many changes and experiences, but I do not despise or make light of any of them. It is certainly sensible to believe that every effect has a cause; and for one I believe that these strange, mystical, and often rich and rapturous experiences, are largely and perhaps wholly caused in many instances by the direct action of God's Spirit on the human spirit. Again, it would seem that men's religious natures are profoundly stirred by human and earthly causes, for the emotion ceases with the cause. It appears to me that if people would only learn to look at these experiences in a sensible way, they would be the better and the wiser for them. We are thus taught what a grand instrument the soul is, and of what divine harmonies and profound emotions it is capable when played upon by any adequate power. To expect to maintain this exaltation with our present nature is like requiring of the athlete that he never relax his muscles, or of the prima donna that she never cease the exquisite trill which is but the momentary proof of what her present organization is capable of. And yet it would appear that many, like poor Haldane, are tempted on one hand to entertain no Christian hope because they cannot produce these deep and happy emotions; or, on the other hand, to give up Christian hope because these emotions cease in the inevitable reaction that follows them. In my opinion it is when we accept of Christ as Saviour and Guide we become Christians and a Christian life is the maintenance of this simple yet vital relationship. We thus continue branches of the 'true vine.' I think Haldane has formed this relationship."

"It would seem from your account that he had formed it, consciously, but a very brief time since," said Dr. Barstow, "and yet for weeks previous he had been putting forth what closely resembles Christian effort, exercising Christian forbearance, and for a time at least enjoying happy spiritual experiences. Can you believe that all this is possible to one who is yet dead in trespasses and sins?"

"My dear Dr. Barstow, I cannot apply your systematic theology to all of God's creatures any more than I could apply a rigid and carefully-lined-out system of parental affection and government to your household. I know that you love all of your children, both when they are good and when they are bad, and that you are ever trying to help the naughty ones to be better. I am inclined to think that I could learn more sound theology on these points in your nursery and dining-room than in your study. I am sure, however, that God does not wait till his little bewildered children reach a certain theological milestone before reaching out His hand to guide and help them."

"You are both better theologians than I am," said Mr. Iverson, "and I shall not enter the lists with you on that ground; but I know what mill-life is to one of his caste and feeling, and his taking such work, and his sticking to it under the circumstances, is an exhibition of more pluck than most young men possess. And yet it was his only chance for when people get down as low as he was they must take any honest work in order to obtain a foothold. Even now, burdened as he is by an evil name, it is difficult to see how he can rise any higher."

"Could you not give him a clerkship?" asked Mrs. Arnot.

"No, I could not introduce him among my other clerks. They would resent it as an insult."

"You could do this," said Mrs. Arnot with a slight flush, "but I do not urge it or even ask it. You are in a position to show great and generous kindness toward this young man. As he who was highest stooped to the lowliest, so those high in station and influence can often stoop to the humble and fallen with a better grace than those nearer to them in rank. If you believe that this young man is now trustworthy, and that trusting him would make him still more so, you could give him a desk in your private office, and thus teach your clerks a larger charity. The influential and assured in position must often take the lead in these matters."

Mr. Iverson thought a moment and then said: "Your proposition is unusual, Mrs. Arnot, but I'll think of it. I make no promises, however."

"Mr. Iverson," added Mrs. Arnot, in her smiling, happy way, "I hope you may make a great deal of money out of your business this year; but if by means of it you can also

aid in making a good and true man you will be still better off. Dr. Barstow here can tell you how sure such investments are."

"If I should follow your lead and that of Dr. Barstow all my real estate would be in the 'Celestial City,'" laughed Mr. Iverson. "But I have a special admiration for the grace of clear grit; and this young fellow in declining his mother's offer and trying to stand on his feet here in Hillaton, where every one is ready to tread him down, shows pluck, whatever else is wanting. I've had my eye on him for some time, and I am about satisfied he is trying to do right. But it is difficult to know what to do for one of his ugly reputation. I will see what can be done, however."

That same evening chilly autumn winds were blowing without, and Mr. Growther's passion for a wood fire upon the hearth was an indulgence to which Haldane no longer objected. The frugal supper was over, and the two oddly diverse occupants of the quaint old kitchen looked at the red coals in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. At last Haldane gave a long deep sigh, which drew to him at once Mr. Growther's small twinkling eyes.

"Tough old world: isn't for sinners like us?" he remarked.

"Well, Mr. Growther, I've got rather tired of inveighing against the world; I'm coming to think that the trouble is largely with myself."

"Umph!" snorted the old man, "I've allers knowed the trouble was with me, for of all crabbed, cranky, cantankerous, old —"

"Hold on," cried Haldane laughing, "don't you remember what Mrs. Arnot said about being unjust to one's self? The only person that I have ever known you to wrong is Jeremiah Growther, and it seems to me that you do treat him outrageously sometimes."

At the name of Mrs. Arnot the old man's face softened, and he rubbed his hands together as he chuckled, "How Satan must hate that woman!"

"I was in hopes that her words might lead you to be a little juster to yourself," continued Haldane, "and it has seemed to me that you, as well as I, have been in a better mood of late."

"I don't take no stock in myself at all," said Mr. Growther emphatically. "I'm a crooked stick and allers will be — a regular old gnarled, knotty stick, with not 'nuff good timber in it to make a penny whistle. That I haven't been in as cussin' a state as usual, isn't because I think any better of myself, but your Mrs. Arnot has set me a-thinkin' on a new track. She come to see me one day while you was at the mill, and we had a real spere'tal tussel. I argued my case in such a way that she couldn't git around it, and I proved to her that I was the driest and crookedest old stick that ever the devil twisted out of shape when it was a grow-in'. On a sudden she turned the argement agin me in a way that has stumped me ever since. 'You are right, Mr. Growther,' she said, 'it was the devil and not the Lord that twisted you out of shape. Now who's the stronger,' she says, 'and who's goin' to have his own way in the end? Suppose you are very crooked, won't the Lord get all the more glory in making you straight, and won't His victory be all the greater over the evil one?' Says I, 'Mrs. Arnot, that's puttin' my case in a new light. If I should be straightened out, it would be the awfulest set-back Old Nick ever had; and if such a thing should happen he'd never feel sure of anyone after that.' Then she turned on me kinder sharp, and says she, 'What right have you got to say that God is allers lookin' round for easy work? What would you think of a doctor who would take only slight cases, and have nothing to do with people who were gittin' dangerous-like? Isn't Jesus Christ the great Physician, and don't your common sense tell you that He is just as able to cure you as a little child?'"

"I declare I was stumped. Like that ill-mannered cuss in the Scrip'ter, who thought his old clothes good enough for the weddin', I was speechless."

"But I got a worse knock down than that. Says she, 'Mr. Growther, I will not dispute all the hard things you have said of yourself (you see I had beat her on that line of argement); I won't dispute all that you say (and I felt a little sot up agin, for I didn't know what she was a-drivin' at), but,' says she, 'I think you've got some natural feelin's. Suppose you had a little son, and while he was out in the street a wicked man should carry him off and treat him so cruelly that, instead of growin' to be strong and fine lookin' he should become a puny deformed little critter. Suppose at last you should hear where he was, and that he was longin' to escape from the cruel hands of his harsh master, who kept on a-treatin' of him worse and worse, would you, his father, go and coolly look at him, and say, 'If you was only a handsome boy, with a strong mind in a strong body, I'd deliver you out of this man's clutches and take you back to be my son again; but since you are a poor, weak, deformed little critter that can never do much, or be much, I'll leave you here to be abused and tormented as before;' is that what you would do, Mr. Growther?'"

"Well, she spoke it all so earnest and real like that I got off my guard, and I just riz right up from my cheer, and I got hold of my heavy old cane there, and it seemed as if my hair stood right up on end, I was that mad at the old curmudgeon that had my boy, and I half shouts, 'No! that ain't what I'd do; I'd go for that cuss that stole my boy, and for every blow he'd given the little chap, I'd give him a hundred.'"

"But what would you do with the poor little boy?" she asks. At that I began to choke, my feelin's was so stirred up, and moppin' my eyes, I said, 'Poor little chap, all beaten and abused out o' shape! What would I do with him? Why, I couldn't do 'nuff for him in tryin' to make him forget all the hard times he'd had.' Then says she, 'You would twit the child with being weak, puny, and deformed, would you?' I was now hobblin' up and down the room in a great state of excitement, and says I, 'Mrs. Arnot, mean a man as I am, I wouldn't treat any human critter so, let alone my own flesh and blood, that had been so abused that it makes my heart ache to think on't.'"

"Don't you think you would love the boy a little even though he had a hump on his back, and his features were