



The Family Circle.

"BOUGHT WITH A PRICE."

Lord Jesus!

Alas! I seem far more mine own
Than Thine, though Thou hast purchased
me;
Strong in weak self, I struggle on
Rackless of what was paid by Thee,
That ransom price of flowing blood,
Outpoured to bring me to my God,
Wholly Thine own!

Lord Jesus!

I have not many days to live,
Would that those days were spent with
Thee;
I have not any gifts to give,
Yet, Lord, Thou wilt accept from me
The love this thankful heart would
pour
Into Thine own deep, boundless store.
This would I give!

Lord Jesus!

Take me, and make me wholly Thine
Through every moment of each day,
My walk Thy walk, my thoughts Thy
thoughts,
My words Thy words, in all I say;
Oh take my spirit, body, soul,
Do thou, dear Lord, possess the whole.
Make Thy will mine!
—Word and Work.

THE MINISTER WHO PLAYED CROQUET.

BY A. J. GORDON, D. D.

It will sound strange to hear even the suggestion that a croquet-mallet could prove a stumbling-block in the path of a minister of the Gospel. Perhaps it rarely could; but the instance in question gives a curious illustration of a little pleasure becoming a great obstruction.

It was in a pleasant country town, much resorted to by summer visitors. The young and cultured minister, fresh from his studies, and fond of congenial association, fell naturally into a large acquaintance with those who spent the season in this beautiful resort. Their occupation was, for the most part, pleasure-seeking; and in his calls among them he naturally conformed to their ways; and so it came about, in a little while, that the most constant and most conspicuous operator on the principal lawns of the village was the new minister.

Nobody, that we are aware of, raised the question of the propriety of his engaging in this pleasant recreation; but there was the large parish, needing the utmost energy to meet its demands; the poor and the sick and the neglected to be cared for; and great hopes had been entertained in the coming of the new minister. The farmers, working from sunrise to sunset, with not a moment to spare, cast questioning looks at the pastor as, passing to and fro about their work, they saw him constantly absorbed on some elegant lawn. The poor people, with rarely a day for recreation and clean clothes, used to wish their lot were easier as they saw the preacher so neatly attired, and so free and happy in his out-of-door pleasures. One member of the church—who, after his hard day's work as a vegetable farmer, was accustomed to walk several miles to hold a prayer-meeting in an unprivileged locality, and of whom it was said that he had probably visited and prayed with every family for miles around his home—was noticed many times to cast a grieved look at the pastor, as he saw him almost every evening among the merry group of players, though no one ever heard him utter a word of censure. A pious lady of the church—whose daughter had been deeply interested while visiting in the city the previous winter and attending evangelistic services there—had invited the minister to tea, in the hope that he would take the opportunity to talk with the daughter and bring her to a decision; but she told a member of the church, with tears, how that, instead of the religious talk for which she had been so anxious, a game of croquet was proposed, after tea, which continued till dark, with not

a word nor a question about the all important theme.

Thus matters went on. There was no harsh censure, no bitter carping about the new preacher, that we could learn of; but there were open eyes, and there was much thinking, and the conviction had become universal that the minister had been captured by croquet; that the innocent sport had become, with him, an actual business, absorbing his time, his interest, his enthusiasm, his energy, to such an extent that the serious duties of his calling seemed really to have become secondary to it.

The vegetable farmer, of whom we just spoke, was as remarkable for his discretion as for his zeal. He was a man of rare mental and spiritual endowments, and every one in the church conceded that his ability to say the right word at the right time was unsurpassed.

About this time the minister received from one of his parishioners the following letter:—

"REVEREND SIR:—You may be somewhat surprised to learn that I, last week, cut down the splendid elm-tree that stood near my house, and which you so much admired when you were here. It cost me a real trial to put the axe to it, but I have done it. The reason is this: I have found that the garden, on which I depend largely for raising the vegetables which I carry to market, has been growing more and more unproductive year by year. I could not account for this, since I have taken great pains to fertilize and till it; but a few months ago I was speaking of it to an old neighbor of mine, who said, 'Why, friend Davis, don't you know the reason? It's that elm-tree. A flourishing elm-tree will ruin any garden for vegetables. You'll find, if you dig down deep enough, that it has been running its roots all under your garden, pushing them farther and farther every year, till now it is prepared to suck the life and nourishment all out of the soil. I never saw a garden yet that held out long if there was an elm-tree in it. It is sure, in the end, to get the life sucked out of it.' On examining into the matter I found it even so. The soil was completely interlaced with roots. There was hardly a square foot where there was not a root sucking. And I hadn't noticed it before, because I had not dug deep enough. So, as I could spare the tree, and could not spare the garden, I concluded to cut it down.

"My dear pastor, I have learned a lesson from this, on which I have been thinking much of late. May not we, as Christians, let some innocent pleasure grow up in the Lord's vineyard, that we are set to cultivate, which, though small at first, may soon become very deep-rooted and wide-spreading—which, before we know it, will steal all the life out of our religion? And may it not be that the reason why the Lord has so little fruit in our lives, is that so much of the vitality of our affections is drawn off and turned into the wood and bark and leaves of mere pleasure? Now, I have concluded that the Lord can get along without ornamental trees in His garden, but He must have fruit; and I never realized before how much meaning there is in those words of Scripture, 'And now the axe is laid unto the roots of the trees; therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' And I have prayed God that if there is any pleasure-tree in my life that is stealing the sap and nourishment that ought to go to bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and true holiness, I will cut it down. And I have thought on the subject so much that I could not help writing and telling you my experience. Perhaps it may furnish you a suggestion for a sermon.

Yours, in the faith of the Gospel,
DAVIS GARDNER."

We have no knowledge of the immediate impression which this letter made on Rev. Mr. —, as he read it; but in a sermon preached shortly after, he certainly alluded to it, though as indirectly as the letter had alluded to him. He preached upon amusements, and spoke, with a severity and bitterness very unusual for him, of those strait-laced saints and sour deacons who grudge the young every innocent enjoyment. He grew very earnest as he pictured "the religion of the future," as that which is destined to give scope to every natural delight, lifting up and sanctifying the drama, the opera and the out-door sport, and teaching men at last the great lesson, "how to make the best of both worlds."

Meanwhile, croquet went on with almost desperate earnestness; and Sunday after Sunday there were sermons on, "The Duty of Cheerfulness in Religion;" "The Dangers of Asceticism;" "Rejoice, O Young Man, in thy Youth," etc.; sermons so remote from any apparent need in the congregation, and at the same time proceeding so evidently from the preacher's own standpoint that one text might have served as a fitting motto for all,—"He, willing to justify himself."

The summer passed, and with it the tide of city visitors receded. The green lawns grew sere and gray as the frosts of winter came on. In the church there was great sorrow over the prevailing spiritual deadness, unrelieved, as yet, by a single token of reviving, and, it must be said, by a single pungent, heart-searching sermon from the pulpit.

At one of the Friday-evening meetings, however, a startling event happened. To the surprise and astonishment of all, the young lady of whom we just spoke arose, and, with great tenderness, said: "Dear friends, I wish to-night to declare my purpose to follow Christ as my Saviour. I have long felt this to be my duty, and I have wished so much for months that some one would only speak to me and tell me what to do; but no one has. Last night, however, as I was walking past the house of a member of this church, he left his work in his garden, and came to the fence and spoke to me. He made the way so plain, and urged my duty so kindly, that I promised I would decide for Christ, and confess Him. I do accept Him, and acknowledge Him now as my Saviour." This testimony, from one so well known, but whose interest in spiritual things up to this time had been so unknown, broke at once the formalism that had so long prevailed in the prayer-meeting. All hearts melted and flowed together. Prayer after prayer and confession after confession followed in quick succession; voices that had not been heard for months broke forth into penitent acknowledgment.

The minister sat, in the midst of it all, like one struck dumb—no, not dumb; his mouth was at last opened, and his real heart revealed for the first time in months. Such a confession as he poured out! The story which everybody knew—how a trivial, innocent recreation had so fascinated him and drawn the whole current of his life into its channel, absorbing his interest, his time, his energy, that he utterly forgot everything else; how the kindest admonition of Christian friends had failed to break the spell, and the work of the Lord had lain idle while the servant of God was at play. "And now," he added, "since I have been so beguiled and intoxicated and defrauded by this recreation, I can only think of it with disgust, and it seems as though I could never touch it again." "That was going to a useless extreme," you may say. "You need not cut down the tree that only needs trimming." But that, alas! is the penalty which we sometimes have to pay for the misuse of innocent pleasures; we are obliged to disuse them, because we foolishly misused them.

But we do not propose to discuss this question; we only wish here to say that we never heard a better or more discriminating sermon on amusements than one preached by our minister a year or more after this croquet experience, from the text, Prov. 24: 16, "Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith and vomit it."—*The Watchword.*

THE LADY'S GIFT.

A few years ago a lady was walking along a solitary road, when two men of very disreputable appearance approached her. As they drew near, she anxiously looked around for help. No human creature was in sight, the dreary moor spread out on all sides, without one habitation upon it—escape was impossible, her heart died within her, and she bitterly reproached herself for having walked in that direction alone.

At that moment, when fear was at its height, a bird suddenly arose from the ground close beside her; she looked down, and the bright blue blossoms of the "forget-me-not," which clustered along the edge of the burn at her feet, met her gaze, and recalled her thoughts to Him to whom the beauties of the wilderness belong. The flower brought a message of peace to her heart, and she walked forward with calmness.

The men soon came up, and, as she ex-

pected, asked for charity. "I have no money with me," she replied.

"But we must have something," they said, their eyes fixed upon her gold watch.

The lady at once took out her pocket Bible and handed it to them. They looked surprised, glanced at each other, and with a polite bow returned the Book, and were going away, when the lady in her turn became the beggar. "Nay, my friends," she said, "I must entreat you to take this, it is of more value than silver or gold; for, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' " She put it into their hands, and hastened away.

Time passed on, and the circumstance had nearly faded from the lady's remembrance, when a fearful accident happened at a neighboring quarry. A large block of stone fell; one man was killed on the spot, and several others very much hurt. As the "quarry village" was at some distance from her residence, the lady did not go to see the sufferers, until a woman of not very respectable character one day called upon her and asked her to go and see her husband, who, she said, was very ill, and the doctor did not think "he was long for this world." She accordingly went, and with some disgust entered the filthy hovel pointed out to her. The loud angry voices, and the strong smell of whiskey which assailed her, before her eyes could recover from the blinding effects of the smoke that escaped through the door alone, almost induced her to turn. She, however, stood still for a few moments, and soon discovered a few tattered rags in the corner, on which the poor man was extended. He raised himself on his elbow as she approached, and holding out her old pocket Bible, said—"Lady, do you remember that? It has indeed been more precious to me than silver or gold; it has told me of Christ and of hope."

The lady gazed at his death-like features; she could not be mistaken, she remembered the man who in his days of strength had forgotten God, and who now, in the midst of ungodly acquaintances, seemed to be confessing Him. She was much overcome, but seeing his time on earth was drawing very near its close, she said, "Thank God, my friend, if this Book has told you of Christ; but what has it told you of yourself?"

"It has told me I am a vile sinner."

"And do you feel yourself a sinner?" she asked.

"Feel myself a sinner?" he replied. "Oh, was there ever such a one out of hell—such a drunkard, such a swearer, such a Sabbath-breaker! Oh, I am indeed the chief of sinners!"

"And in what, then, is your hope?" enquired the lady.

"My hope is in Christ," replied the dying man. "My sure stay is in Him; He has shown me my sins, but He has also shown me His own righteousness—in Him is my hope, and in Him is my salvation."

This was enough; the lady had no longer doubted, but rejoiced over her brother who had been lost, but was found again. After some further conversation, she enquired after his companion who had been with him when she gave them her Bible.

"Ah, that is the sad thing, my lady; his is the sad story, poor man."

"Was it he that was killed when the stone fell?" exclaimed the lady.

"Oh no, far worse than that. May God help him!"

He seemed unwilling to speak, but when the room was somewhat cleared of its many inmates, she said—"You see, my lady, the thing is this. We took little thought of your blessed book for awhile after you gave it, and we kept on in our wicked courses, till John, poor lad, took ill, and then he began to read, and to talk a deal of what I did not understand, and I thought his brain was turned; but I took the book myself, and soon I saw it was his heart was turned, not his head. Oh, blessed be the God and Saviour of us both!"

"Well," said the lady, "that is indeed a matter of thankfulness. I do not understand what distresses you about John."

"Ah, John, poor lad, you see, after we both began to read, the girls there (meaning John's and his own wife) and the lads began to talk, and his reverence got hold of it, and just then the stone fell at the quarry, and Tim O'Neal was killed, and many more was not much better, myself one of them; and after that his reverence came up, and said it was a judgment on us for reading in the