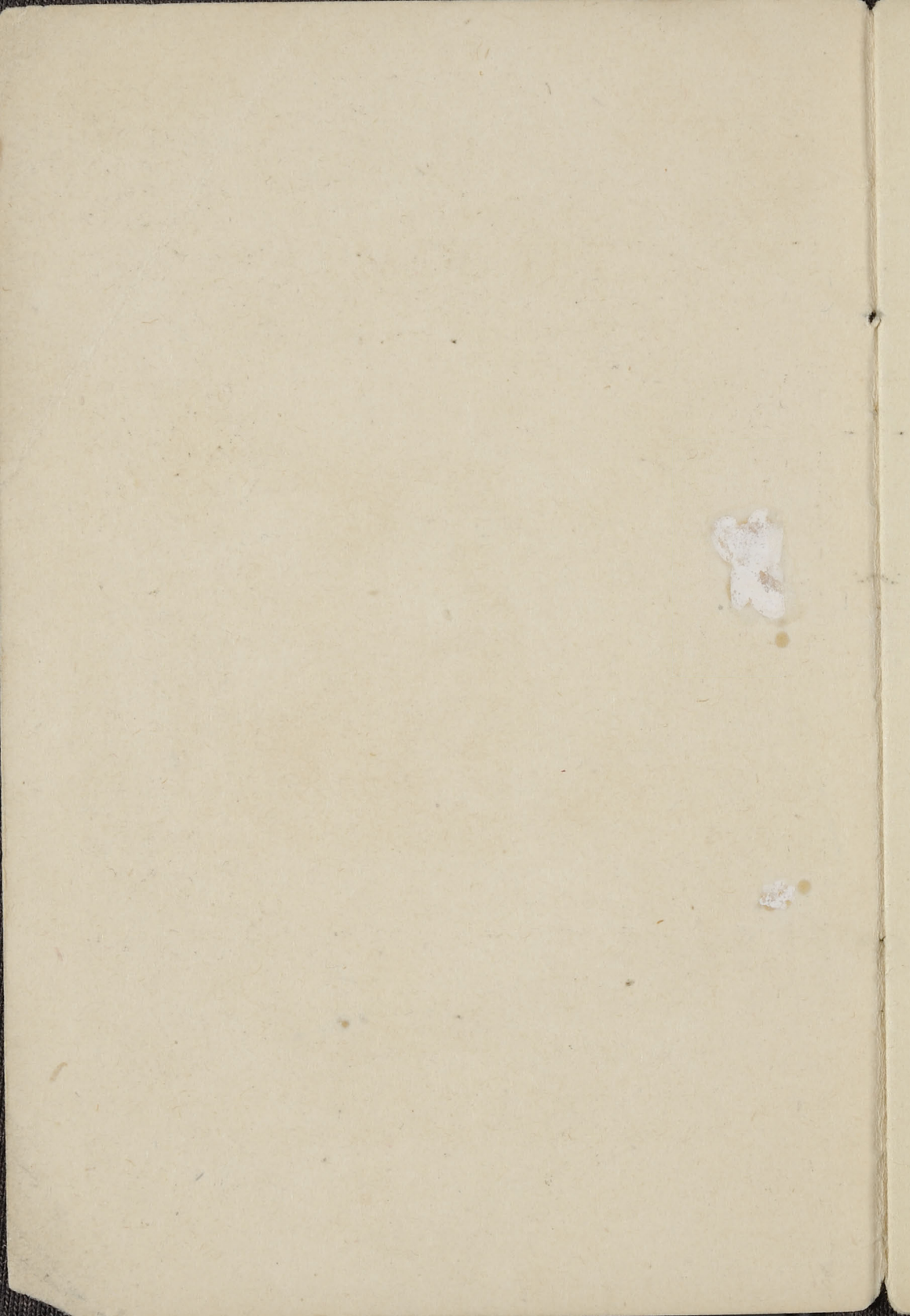


The Visit.

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THE VISIT.

SOME time ago I was informed that a poor woman whom I had occasionally seen and spoken to in the houses of my neighbors, was in a very declining state of health. I took an early opportunity to visit her. I found her sitting by the fire, with her infant asleep on her lap. She was so changed, that I should scarcely have recollected her; but she welcomed me with great pleasure, and thanked me much for coming so far to see her.

After inquiring the particulars of her illness, I remarked that it was hard sometimes for poor blind creatures like us to see the hand of love in taking away our greatest comforts, as much as in giving them.

She shook her head, and looked up.

“Tell me,” said I, “are you able to do this?”

She answered very emphatically, “My trust is in Almighty God.”

“But why do you trust him?”

“Because I know he is just and merciful.”

“But do you understand how he can be both just and merciful together?”

She looked as if she did not comprehend my meaning.

“Are we not sinners?” I asked.

“Yes, indeed, very great sinners,” said she.

“Well, God’s justice bids him punish us for our sins. How can he become merciful without ceasing to be just? His justice would send us to hell; we confess that we deserve it, should he do so; yet you expect to go to heaven; at least, I suppose you do.”

“Yes; I pray to him to forgive me my sins, and I trust that he will be merciful, and take me to heaven.”

I considered the case of poor Mary: it was clear that she acknowledged herself a sinner, and that she had no appeal except to the mercy of God. But then she was ignorant of the only plea by which a sinner can approach him; and my task was clearly to exhibit Christ to her, as the propitiation for our sins.

I secretly prayed for direction; and then, after expressing my grief to think what pain she was suffering, and suggesting some relief to it, I returned to my work, saying, “It is so comforting, when we feel the hand of God laid heavily upon us, to remember that he does not take pleasure in afflicting his poor creatures, but makes it a means for good to them, if they be willing to profit by it.”

"Ah yes," said she with a smile of satisfaction, which arose, as I well knew, from the belief that her bodily pains would assist to make satisfaction for her sins.

"I will tell you a most interesting story," said I, "of something which happened very many hundreds of years ago, but which is perfectly true. There were a multitude of people, a nation called Israelites, to whom God had an especial favor. They had been sorely oppressed by a mightier nation than themselves, so that their sufferings were dreadful. In the midst of this affliction, God had wonderfully delivered them, bringing them out in safety from the land of Egypt; and when their enemies pursued them even to the sea-side, he caused the waters to part and stand on heaps, and led them through, with their children and cattle, as on dry ground."

"Glory be to God!" said Mary, devoutly.

"Amen," said I. "Having saved the Israelites from their foes, he brought them forward towards a rich land, which he had promised to give them; but the way being through a great wilderness, where they were perfect strangers, the Lord God led them by a remarkable cloud through the day, and at night by a pillar of fire. To feed them, he rained bread from heaven; and when they wished for meat, he sent them birds without number, falling about their camp. For drink, he

opened a hard rock, and gave them water abundantly; and he suffered not their garments to wear out, nor their feet to swell; and he destroyed kings with their armies, who would have opposed their progress. After all this, think what must have been their ingratitude and sin, to murmur against God, and wish themselves back in Egypt again."

"That was shocking."

"Yes; and it provoked a dreadful punishment. The Lord sent among them fiery serpents, terrible creatures, which bit the people; and so poisonous were they, that every one who was bitten would certainly have died. There was no cure found; no physician could help, no medicine could relieve them, and in a short time a great number of the people lay dead, while many more were dying around."

My poor hearer seemed deeply interested, anxiously waiting for the sequel, but said nothing. I continued, "Now there was a good man named Moses, who had been appointed by the Lord God to take charge of all these Israelites; the people came to him, expressing their sorrow for having sinned against God, and beseeching him to pray for them, that the serpents might be taken away. Moses did so, and the Lord heard him; and what do you suppose was the answer?"

"Did the Almighty take the serpents away?"

“He appointed an extraordinary thing. He ordered Moses to make a serpent of brass, like the fiery serpents, and to set it on a pole, high enough for all the people to see; and when any one was bitten by the fiery serpents, if he came and looked at that serpent of brass, he was immediately cured, restored to health and strength. Was not this wonderful?”

“Surely it was. God is very merciful.”

“But now, listen to me very attentively. When the blessed Lord Jesus our Saviour was upon earth, there came to him one night a learned man, a Jew, who wanted to be taught by him the way to serve God. Our Lord told him what he had never before understood, that the right way to serve God was by believing in his only Son Jesus Christ; and he spoke these words to Nicodemus: ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’”

Here Mary fixed her eyes on me with a look of awakened interest, such as I have many times observed to follow upon this plan of *first* relating, as an interesting story, the narrative contained in the 21st chapter of Numbers, and then proceeding to its application.

“You will observe,” said I, “how beautifully the whole story of the serpents agrees with what

our Lord Jesus came to do; and as Nicodemus knew quite well what happened to his forefathers in the wilderness, it was no doubt very delightful to him. By the help of God the Holy Spirit, Nicodemus might then understand—and so may you and I—that we all are like the Israelites. How many great mercies has God shown to us; how tenderly has he cared for us; how many dangers has he delivered us from; how bountifully he has fed and clothed us; and how readily he would have given us the good land of heaven to possess for ever and ever. But alas, are we not full of wicked rebellion and murmuring and mistrusting and grieving this compassionate Father—as ready to provoke him, as he is to bless and favor us?”

“We are very bad sinners *indeed*,” she said with much feeling; “but He is so merciful.”

“Yes, and He has a particular way of being merciful—one only way, as the history has shown us. You know He could have destroyed the serpents, and cured the Israelites at a word; but then we should have lost the great lesson which our Lord gave to Nicodemus and to us. Oh Mary, our sins are the bites of a fiery serpent, and there is no help, no cure, to be found among us. All are bitten, all are dying, all want assistance, and none can give it. In this dreadful condition, God has prepared a wonderful cure. You know, the

serpent which Moses made was *like* those destroying creatures; it was lifted up on high; and the cure was done by *looking at it*. Even so the eternal Son of God took upon him the *likeness* of sinful flesh; he was lifted up on the cross, as the serpent was on the pole; and it is by *believing* that He can entirely cure and save us, having been so lifted up, that we escape ruin."

She had fixed her eyes on me more intently than ever, and I was greatly encouraged. With secret prayer, I proceeded: "Suppose a poor wounded Israelite lying in his tent, dying under the anguish of a fiery wound; and that another comes and says to him, 'There is a remedy—you may yet live. A serpent of brass has been set up on a pole by God's command; and whosoever looks upon it is healed at once. Come, do not delay; look and live.' You can fancy the poor creature, able to believe that what God has said shall surely come to pass, crawling along from his tent till he comes within sight of the brazen serpent, lifting his dying eyes, and gazing on it with a long earnest look: you can fancy him delivered from pain, springing to his feet full of life and health and joy; and then falling down to worship his God in heaven, who had so wonderfully delivered him from death."

"Glory be to the Almighty God!" was her fervent ejaculation.

“Well, this Israelite was saved because he believed. We must now suppose another, who, in the same state of suffering, received the same message; and who might have replied, ‘Why do you mock me with such idle words? The physician might do me some good, perhaps; there may be medicine that would relieve me, salve that could heal these burning wounds; but who can be so mad as to think that looking on a bit of brass will do it?’ To this the other might again reply, that God had appointed it, as the only means of cure: but the dying man, still refusing to believe that God had made such a simple remedy sufficient, would remain where he was, and perish. Tell me, in that case, what would be the cause of his destruction?”

“He would not believe that God had put the serpent there to cure him,” said she.

“Just so; and just such poor dying, obstinate, unbelieving sinners are we. God’s hand is stretched out to punish us for our wickedness, and we know that we deserve only his wrath. We are full of sin, which we can no more get free from, than the wounded Israelites from the poison of the fiery bites. In this miserable state, we are told that Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross for us, to make satisfaction for our sins, by suffering in our stead, and that, believing in him, we shall be saved. We ask, ‘How are we to be-

lieve?' We are to look on him as the Israelites did on the brazen serpent, convinced that he is the only helper, and that his help is sufficient for us. We don't know how to credit this: we reply, that we must have other help—that our clergy, indeed, can doctor our souls; that the medicine of our prayers and alms, our fastings, and what we imagine to be good works, may do a good deal towards our cure; but the word that bids us 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' seems as idle as the word which told the wretched Israelite to look on the serpent of brass, and he should live. You don't justify the obstinate man who refused to do this, and so died in his tent; because it was God's message, and he ought to have believed it. Can we justify ourselves, if we persist in rejecting what is equally God's message to us, and die in our sins, by disbelieving that precious assurance which I before repeated to you, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, EVEN so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?' Oh, do not perish, when everlasting life is offered to you. Do not perish, merely because you think it impossible that God should have dealt so very mercifully with you, as to lay upon another the work which you never could have done for yourself. It is his own word too: 'God so loved the

world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' ”

The evening was closing; and the little cottage became so dark that I could no longer see the changes of Mary's countenance. I said, “I hope I have not fatigued you.”

“O no, no !”

“Well, they are precious truths that I have told you; and though it is getting late, I will tell you how sweetly they comforted a poor boy who died some time ago. I brought him over from our own dear Ireland—he was deaf and dumb. He had many remarkable thoughts about the Saviour, and placed his whole trust in him. He used to tell me, that in a great book God had written down all his sins, which, he said, were very many; but that Jesus Christ had opened that book and passed his hand over the leaf—that dear hand which was torn by the cruel nails when they fastened him to the cross. The bleeding hand had, as my Irish boy said, blotted out the writing; so that when God looked in the book for Jack's sins, he saw only the blood of his dear Son, slain for such sinners.”

Mary at this suddenly clasped her hands, and lifted them up with a cry for mercy, as if she had just then seen the way in which it was to be found. I was rejoiced, and went on. “That

beautiful thought made my poor boy's life happy, his death-bed peaceful, and his end glorious. Now he is in heaven, blessing and praising God, who gave his dear Son to die for him, and also gave him grace to believe it. The serpent lifted up by Moses was but a bit of brass—in itself it had no power or holiness; it was, however, carefully preserved by the Jews as a memorial of this great deliverance; yet, after a while, the ignorant people began to worship it, and so dishonored God, and brought more of his anger upon themselves; on which account the good king Hezekiah caused it to be broken in pieces and destroyed. In like manner, some in our day are so foolish as to pay a sort of worship to images and pictures, as if *they* had any thing to do with the blood shed for our redemption. The great enemy of our souls well knows that salvation is to be had simply by looking to the Lord Jesus, as the only propitiation for our sins; Satan, therefore, is glad to put any thing between us and the Saviour that can hinder our doing so. My poor wounded friend, God has smitten your body with sickness, and your heart, I think, with a sense of your sinful, helpless state. Take comfort: the body may pine in sickness, and moulder in the grave; but if you have faith to believe the tender loving-kindness of your God, the soul shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

When I rose to depart, she grasped my hand, anxiously saying, "Will you come and see me again?"

"Yes, indeed, God willing, I will come often, if you desire it."

And I often visited her: during the last three months of her life, I went to her almost every day, and saw the work of grace proceed, step by step, until she was removed from grace to glory. About six weeks before her death, in the midst of dreadful bodily torture from an internal cancer, she was speaking with great animation of the bright and happy place to which she was going: I remarked, "You are always very confident; have you no fear that you may come short of heaven at last?"

"No, I have not."

"Are you not a great sinner?"

"O yes, a very great one indeed!"

"Are you never afraid that, at last, God may show you the number and guilt of your sins, and tell you that He, who is all holiness and purity, cannot admit so vile a creature to dwell with him?"

"No, I am not afraid of that."

"Why not?"

"Because he is just and true: he cannot lie."

"Most certainly he cannot; but, dear Mary, that is what I want to know, *how* his excluding you from heaven, where no evil thing can come,

would be telling a lie. Has he ever said any thing to you that will oblige him to receive you at last?"

She fixed her eyes on me with a keen and steady expression, deliberately replying, "Yes, he has."

"When, and how?"

"He has said, Whoever will come to me shall not perish, but have everlasting life; and it was to save sinners that he died on the cross."

These were her very words; they made my heart leap with joy, but I went on:

"And do you really think that will be answer enough to all that can be said against you?"

"Yes, it will."

About the time at which the last-mentioned conversation took place, I was reading to dear Mary the temptation of our Lord—pointing out to her that in every instance he baffled the enemy by bringing forward the written word of God. When dwelling on the passage, "It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," I was surprised at her exclaiming, "Hark! I think I hear my father saying, 'Listen, children, to me: there is none to be worshipped but God alone; honor is due to none other—worship God only.'"

Rather puzzled, I asked, "Who said that?"

"My father: when I was six years old, he used to read the Bible to us—it was always in

his hand. O, yes; and now I remember how I knelt down and prayed, after my father had read to me out of the Bible—I remember it all now. O, my Saviour, how I have been forgetting it all these years!”

She laid her hands over her face, and appeared quite overwhelmed. I was lost in astonishment and thankfulness. I saw the seed springing up which a pious father had sown twenty-six years before; and I wanted faith rightly to believe the delightful truth in which I was then rejoicing. From that time she frequently interrupted our reading with, “I remember that.” “I have heard my father say that.” Mary had not enjoyed the counsel of her pious father since she was six years old. Reader, have you an infant charge? Remember Mary, and “*in the morning sow thy seed.*”

Not long after, we were privileged to stand beside our dear Mary when she sweetly breathed her soul into the hands of her Redeemer, while we gave thanks to God the Father for the victory achieved, in the name of his dear Son, through the power of the Holy Ghost: “For of him, and to him, and through him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

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