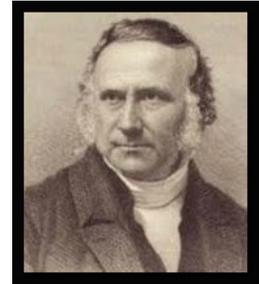


Faith Everything



Among a large number of young people, who, at one time, were in the habit of meeting me every week, for the purpose of personal conversation on the subject of religion; there was a very quiet, contemplative young woman, whose candor and simplicity of heart interested me very much. She did not appear to me, to be susceptible of much impulsive emotion, but to be very much a child of thought. Her convictions of sin, which appeared to me to be deep and clear, were uniformly expressed, more in the language of reason, than of emotion; so that I sometimes feared, that she had only an ordinary and intellectual conviction, without much real discovery of her character, as a sinner against God. In addition to all the conversation I could have with her in the presence of others; I often visited her at her own home. And because of her apparent destitution of any deep emotions, and my consequent fear, that her convictions were more speculative than real; I labored to unfold to her the character of God, his Law, the nature of sin, the state of her own heart; and aimed to impress truths of this kind upon her feelings and conscience. She assented to it all. I urged upon her, the necessity of immediate repentance, her lost condition as a sinner, and her indispensable necessity of the atoning blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, to save her from merited condemnation. She assented to all this. I explained to her, again and again, the whole way of salvation for sinners, the grace of God, and the willingness of Christ to save her. She said she believed it all. I cautioned her against resisting the Holy Spirit, by unbelief, by prayerlessness, by delaying her repentance and her fleeing to

Christ; and in every mode that my thoughts could devise, I tried to lead her to the gospel salvation. But it all seemed to be ineffectual. She remained apparently in the same state of mind. Thus she continued for several weeks. She gained nothing, and lost nothing. Studious of her Bible, prayerful, attentive to all the means of grace, she was still without peace, and still manifested no additional anxiety, and no disposition to discontinue her attempts to attain salvation. For a time, there had been with her manifestly an increasing solemnity and depth of seriousness; but this time had gone by; and she remained, to all appearance, fixed in the same unchanging state of mind.

Such was her condition, when I visited her again, without much expectation of any good to result from anything I could say. After many inquiries, and trying all my skill to ascertain, if possible, whether there was any vital religious truth which she did not understand, or any sin which she was not willing to abandon; I said to her plainly:—"Mary, I can do you no good! I have said to you everything appropriate to your state, that I can think of. I would aid you most willingly, if I could; but I can do you no good."

"I do not think you can," said she calmly; "but I hope you will still come to see me."

"Yes, I will," said I. "But all I can say to you is, I know there is salvation for you; but you must repent, you must flee to Christ."

We went from her house directly to the evening lecture. I commenced the service, by reading the Hymn of Dr. Watts:

There is a voice of sovereign grace
Sounds from the sacred word;
"Ho! ye despairing sinners come
And trust upon the Lord."

My soul obeys the almighty call,
And runs to this relief;
I would believe thy promise, Lord,
Oh! help my unbelief.
To the dear fountain of thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly;
Here let me wash my spotted soul
From crimes of deepest die.
Stretch out thine arm, victorious King,
My reigning sins subdue;
Drive the old dragon from his seat,
With his apostate crew.
A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all!

This hymn was sung, and the service conducted in the usual manner. I forgot all about Mary, as an individual, and preached as appropriately as I was able, to the congregation before me.

The next day she came to me to tell me, that she “had made a new discovery.”

“Well,” said I, “what is it that you have discovered?”

“Why, sir,” said she, “the way of salvation all seems to me now perfectly plain. My darkness is all gone. I see now what I never saw before.”

“Do you see that you have given up sin and the world? and given your whole heart to Christ?”

“I do not think that I am a Christian; but I have never been so happy

before. All is light to me now. I see my way clear; and I am not burdened and troubled as I was.”

“And how is this? what has brought you to this state of mind?”

“I do not know how it is, or what has brought me to it. But when you were reading that Hymn last night, I saw the whole way of salvation for sinners perfectly plain, and wondered that I had never seen it before. I saw that I had nothing to do, but to trust in Christ:

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall.

I sat all the evening, just looking at that hymn. I did not hear your prayer. I did not hear a word of your sermon. I do not know your text. I thought of nothing but that hymn; and I have been thinking of it ever since. It is so light, and makes me so contented. Why, sir,” (said she, in the perfect simplicity of her heart, never thinking that she was repeating what had been told her a thousand times,) “don’t you think that the reason why we do not get out of darkness sooner, is, that we don’t believe?”

“Just that, Mary,—precisely that. Faith in Jesus Christ to save is the way to heaven.”

The idea had not yet occurred to her mind, that she was a Christian. She had only discovered the way. I did not think it wise for me to suggest the idea to her at all, but leave her to the direction of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the hymn. If the Holy Spirit had given her a new heart, I trusted he would lead her to hope, as soon as he wanted her to. The hymn which had opened her eyes, was the best truth for her to meditate at present.

I conversed with her for some time. She had no more troubles, no

darkness, no difficulties. All was clear to her mind, and she rejoiced in the unexpected discovery she had made. "I now know what to do," said she; "I must trust in Jesus Christ; and I believe God will enable me to do so." It was not till after the lapse of some days, that she began to hope,—that she had really been reconciled to God. But she finally came to the conclusion, that her religion commenced, when she sat, that evening, pondering that hymn, and wondering she "had never discovered before, that sinners must believe."

She afterwards became a communicant in the church; and to the day of her death, so far as I have been able to ascertain, she lived as a believer.

This case has suggested to my mind the inquiry, whether, as ministers, after all our preaching upon faith, we do not fail to insist directly upon it as we ought, and tell inquirers, as Mary told me, "we have nothing to do but to trust." I deem it not improbable, that by the extensive and labored explanations we give, the minds of inquirers are often confused; and the very way we take to make religion plain, is the very means of making it obscure; and that Mary's simplicity of faith would be a far better sermon for many such persons. All the matter of a soul's closing with Christ may be wrapped up in a very little space,—may be a very simple thing. And what that thing is, the Holy Spirit seems to have taught Mary, "We have nothing to do but to trust!"