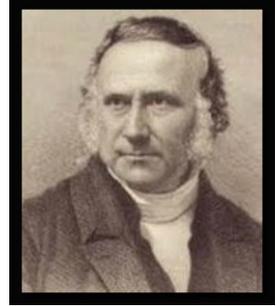


Superstition



I was sent for by a woman who was in great distress, in respect to her preparation for death. She was fully convinced that she should not live long, though now able to ride out daily, and seldom confined to her bed by her infirmity. She was a member of a neighboring church; but she said,—“I have no peace of mind, and no witness that God has given me a new heart.”

I had not been acquainted with her before. She appeared to be an unimaginative, amiable woman, who loved her husband and her children, but she had not a very discriminating mind. Her wealthy, moral, but irreligious parents had done little for her, except to indulge her and train her in the love of money, and the enjoyments it can furnish.

I strove to instruct her in the way of life. I visited her almost every week for a long time. She gained little or nothing in hope. There was something strange about her, which I could not understand. Her mind would be drawn off from the very things which I was most anxious to fasten upon it. One day she mentioned to me what a “bright witness,” as she called it, one of her acquaintances had. She told me what it was. “It was a great light that appeared to her, and filled all the room where she was.” The silly girl who told her this silly story some years before, had sometimes induced her to attend religious meetings with her, among a class of people more apt to see such visions, and more fond of them than I am; and now, the poor woman’s mind was constantly on the look-out for some such “great light.” She said, “I want some witness to myself.” With this expectation her mind was occupied; it was called off from the

truth, and bewildered and confused by this superstition. Again and again I explained to her the unscriptural nature of all such notions, and taught her that such “great lights” existed only in the imaginations of people, very nervous or very silly, or both. I thought I had succeeded in dissipating her superstitious notions, and for some months (during the lapse of which I often saw her), I had hoped that she was led to put faith before fancy, and look to Christ and not to visions, for comfort and salvation. But after all this, being in trouble she sent for me. I went. She brought up the same story of a “great light,” and asked me,—

“Why don’t I see some such witness?”

“For three reasons,” said I; “first, you are not nervous enough; second, you are not imaginative enough; third, you are not quite fool enough.”

Then I went over all the explanations of Bible religion again, and all the arguments to demonstrate the superstition of such notions as she had about some external witness, and expel it from her mind. She appeared to be convinced, said she was, and for some weeks seemed to enjoy a rational hope in Christ. I had a hope for her.

A few days before her death she sent for me again. She was in deep distress,—in despair. She asked me if I thought she should “not have some such bright witness before she died.” She died without it.

Superstition is mischievous. It hinders the exercises of faith, where faith exists; it prevents faith where it does not exist. Superstitious people are silly. The sights they see, the strange sounds they hear, the voices whispering some words or some texts of Scripture in their ears, are nothing but fancies, not facts; and if they were facts, they would be no evidence at all that these persons had become the children of God. Bible evidences of religion are entirely different.