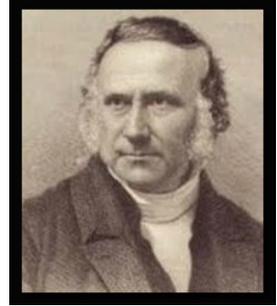


The Brown Jug



In the course of my pastoral visits, I called upon a man who was a member of my congregation, a farmer, between fifty and sixty years of age, a plain man, accustomed to daily labor. He was not a communicant, and I had no reason to think him to be a pious man. He was a regular attendant upon the religious services of the Sabbath; but I had never seen him in any religious assembly at any other time. He was regarded as a respectable man, I believe, in all respects. His wife was a pious woman, whom I had sometimes conversed with, and who had expressed to me her anxiety in regard to the religious state of her husband. He had been for so many years living under the means of grace, without being led to repentance and faith in Christ; that she was afraid his mind had settled down upon some ruinous error, or into a strange stupidity, so that he never would become a Christian. She said she had often talked to him on the subject of his religious duty; but he seldom entered into any free conversation upon it; indeed, "he would say almost nothing at all about himself." He would hear what she had to say, without 'any opposition, and with apparent willingness; but he seldom made any reply, except to make some general acknowledgment of the importance of the subject. He had a family of children, the most of whom had already arrived at the years of manhood, and none of them manifested any disposition to obey the gospel in spirit and in truth. They were a moral and industrious family. The sons were much like their father, with the exception, that they less frequently were seen at church. The family resided some distance from my residence, and I had not known them very intimately, except the mother,

as the rest of the family were usually absent in the field, when I called at their house.

Before the time to which I refer, I had never found this man at home; nor had I been able to converse with him at all in reference to his religious duty. Soon after I entered the house, his wife retired from the room, and left me alone with him. I immediately addressed him on the subject of religion. He appeared candid and solemn. I found that he had no hope in Christ. He said that religion had, for many years, appeared to him as a solemn and important duty. He wished he was a Christian. He said he was folly sensible, that he was a sinner in God's sight, and was exposed to his righteous justice. He referred to the sermons which he heard from Sabbath to Sabbath; and said it was a wonder to him, that they did not influence him more. But he supposed that he had "little true conviction of sin," and little sense of his real condition, or he should be a different man.—In this manner he spake of himself very freely, for a long time.

He appeared to me to be a man of respectable mind, rather slow in thought and in his sensibilities, but of sound judgment, and of some discrimination.

I urged him to give his instant and prayerful attention to his salvation; but he did not seem inclined to yield to my solicitation. I pressed it upon him strongly. I recited to him the promises of God, made to them that seek him; and the threatenings of God against the neglecters of salvation. Still he appeared unmoved. I then concluded to put together, in a manner adapted to his cast of mind, some of the most urgent appeals that I could think of. I commenced. Said I:—

“You are already somewhat advanced in life. Your remaining years will be few. You have no time to lose. You have lost enough already. If you do not become a follower of Christ soon, you never will. You have a

family of children. You have never set them an example of piety. You have never prayed with them as you ought to have done. Your neglect goes far to destroy all the influence which their mother might have over them. They copy your example. God will hold you accountable for a father's influence. You may be the cause of their ruin, because—”

“That often troubles me,” said he, (interrupting me in the middle of what I designed to say.)

“It ought to trouble you. It is a serious matter, for a father to live before his sons without acknowledging God, without prayer, without hope, just as if he and they had no more interest in the matter of religion than the beast, whose ‘spirit goeth downward to the earth.’”

“Yes, indeed it is,” said he. “And I am now getting to be an old man, I wish I could get religion.”

“You can. The whole way is clear. God's word has made it so.”

“I will begin,” said he, emphatically. “But I wish you would make a prayer with us. I will call in Mrs. E— and the boys.”

He immediately called them.

After my saying a few words to each of them, and briefly addressing them all, we knelt together in prayer. As we rose from our knees, he said to his children, very solemnly:—“Boys, I hope this visit of our minister will do us all good. It is time for us to think of our souls.” I left them.

The next Sabbath they were all in church. At the close of the morning service I had some conversation again with the father. He appeared to be honestly and fully determined to “deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus Christ.”

He continued very much in this state of mind for some months, sensible of his need of Christ to save him, and prayerful for divine mercy. I saw him and conversed with him many times. He did not appear to make any progress either in knowledge or sensibility. He did not go back; but he was stationary. He prayed in secret. He prayed in his family. He studied his Bible. He conversed with me freely. He sought opportunity for conversation. Uniformly he appeared solemn and in earnest. But he found no peace with God, no hope in Christ. Evidently he was in deep trouble of mind.

As he was not a man of much cultivation of mind, I aimed to teach him the truth in the most plain and simple manner. I proved everything, and explained everything. It was all in vain. Months rolled on. He continued in the same state. It was impossible to discover or conjecture what kept him from Christ. His condition filled me with solicitude; but I studied it in vain. I made inquiries about him among his friends and neighbors, to learn if possible, his whole disposition and his character of mind. But I soon discovered, as I thought, that I knew him better than anybody else.

More than six months after he began to give his prayerful attention to his salvation, as I was riding towards his house, just at a turn in the road, where it wound round a hill, which hindered our seeing each other till we were close together, I suddenly met him. He was riding in his one-horse wagon towards the village. I stopped my horse to speak to him, and I thought he appeared disposed to pass on. But as the road was narrow, and I had stopped my carriage, the wheels of our vehicles almost touched each other, and he could not well get by. We had a long conversation, as we sat in our carriages, in that retired and romantic spot.. But I discerned no change in his religious feelings. He was as determined, but as hopeless as ever.

At length my eye happened to rest on a brown jug, which would contain about two gallons, and which was lying on its side, under the seat of his wagon. The thought came into my mind, that he might be accustomed to the use of stimulating drinks, and that that might be an injury and a hindrance to him in his religious endeavors. I had never heard or suspected that he was an intemperate man. Probably the idea never would have occurred to me that strong drink might be his hindrance, had I not been utterly unable to account for his stationary condition in respect to religion. I instantly resolved to speak to him on that subject. But it was an awkward business. I did not know how to begin. I would not insult him, and I did not wish to injure his feelings. He was an old man, near sixty—old enough to be my father. And to suggest the idea, that he might be guilty of any excess, would seem to be cruel and uncalled for. But I thought it my duty to make some inquiry. So I began:—

“Mr. E., where are you going this morning?”

“I am going to the village—to the store.”

“I see you have got a jug there, under your seat; what are you going to do with that?”

He cast his eye down upon it, a little confused, for an instant, as I thought; but he immediately replied—

“I am going to get some rum in it.”

“Are you accustomed to drink rum?”

“I never drink any, to hurt me.”

“You never drink any, to do you any good.”

“I have thought it did, sometimes. I do not drink much.”

“Do you drink it every day?”

“No, not every day, commonly. We had none to use in the field, this year, in all our haying, till we came to the wet meadow; when the boys said we should get the fever, if we worked with our feet wet, and had nothing to drink.”

“So you have used it, since that time. You carry it into the field, I suppose?”

“Yes; we commonly do, in haying and harvest.”

“Well; at other times of the year, do you keep it on hand, in your house?”

“Yes; I always keep it. But it is only a little that I drink; sometimes a glass of bitters, in the morning,—or, when I am not well, and feel that I need something.”

“Mr. E., then you are perplexed, annoyed, or in some trouble; do you never take a drink, on that account?”

“I am very apt to. It seems to keep me up.”

“Well, now, just tell me: for a good many months back, since you have been troubled on the subject of religion, have you been accustomed to resort to it, to ‘keep you up?’”

“Yes; at times. I feel the need of it.”

“In my opinion, that is the worst thing, my dear friend, that you could do!”

“Why, I only drink a little, at home. I have not carried it into the field, except in haying time.”

“So I understand it. But one question more: Have you not often, at home, when you have felt downcast in mind, on account of sin, taken a drink, because you felt thus troubled?”

“I believe I have done it sometimes. I cannot tell how often. I never thought much about it.”

I had become convinced by this time, that he was, at least, in danger; and that it was not at all an improbable thing, that his drinking just kept him from repentance. I told him so; and then began, with all my sagacity and power of persuasion, to induce him to quit all intoxicating drinks forever. At first, he appeared not to believe me at all. He heard me, just as if he had made up his mind, and did not care what I said. His eyes wandered carelessly around, over the fields and trees, and then turned upon his old horse, as if he was impatient to start on, and get out of the way of a lecture which he disbelieved. After a time, however, and while I was stating to him some facts within my own knowledge, to show the uselessness of strong drink, he became apparently interested in what I was saying. He listened, and I went on with my plea. As I explained the effect of intoxicating drink upon the mind, and upon the feelings, and the conscience of men, he hung down his head, and appeared to be lost in thought. After a while, as I kept talking, he cast a glance at his jug; then looked up; and then his eyes fell back upon his jug again. I kept reasoning with him; but he did not look at me any longer,—he did not appear to be thinking of what I was saying. He appeared rather to be engaged in deep thought; and his eye often turned upon his jug. By-and-by he slowly reached down his hand, and took hold of it. With a very solemn

countenance, and without saying a word,—(he had not spoken for half an hour,)—he placed the brown jug upon his knee. I talked on, watching his silent motions. He turned his head very deliberately around, one way and the other, as if he were looking for something; his eyes glancing here and there, as if he did not see what he desired. I kept on talking to him.

Just at the spot where we were, the road swept politely round a huge stone, or side of a rock, which rose about ten feet above the path; and as those who built the road could not get it out of the way, the path made rather a short turn round it. This rock was within three feet of his wagon. His eye fixed upon it, and then glanced back to the jug upon his knee. Then he looked at the rock, and then at his jug again, and then at me. And thus his eye continued to wander from one to another of these three objects, as if it could not get beyond them. At first, I was in some doubt which of the three was the most attractive to his eye,—the rock, the brown jug, or myself. But in a little time I noticed that his eye rested on the brown jug longer than on me. At length I was lost sight of altogether, (though I continued talking to him,) and his eye glanced backwards and forwards, from the brown jug to the rock, and from the rock to the brown jug. All this time he maintained an unbroken silence, and I kept on with my lecture.

Finally he seized the poor jug by its side, wrapping the long fingers of his right hand half round it, and slowly rising from his seat, he stretched up his tall frame to its full length, and lifting the brown jug aloft, as high as his long arm could reach, he hurled it, with all his might, against the rock, dashing it into a thousand pieces. “Whoa! whoa! whoa!” (said he to the old horse.) “Hold on here. Whoa! whoa! Turn about here. Whoa! We will go home now.”—The horse had suddenly started forwards, frightened at the clatter of the brown jug, and the pieces which bounded back against legs and side. The start was very sudden; and as my long friend was standing up, it came near to pitch his tall figure out of the wagon backwards. However, he did not fall. As he cried” whoa! whoa!” he

put back his long arm upon the side of the wagon, and saved himself. He soon stopped his old horse; and deliberately turning him round in the street, till he got him headed towards home, he put on the whip, and without saying a word to me, or even casting a parting look, he drove off like Jehu. I drove on after him as fast as I could; but I could not catch him. He flew over the road. And when I passed his house, about a mile from the jug-rock, he was stripping off the harness, in a great hurry. We exchanged a parting bow, as I drove by; and I never spake to him about rum afterwards.

Within a single month from this time, that man became, as he believed, a child of God. His gloom and fears were gone; and he had peace, by faith in Jesus Christ.

About a month afterwards, as I passed the spot, where such a catastrophe came upon the jug, and where my long friend came so near to be toppled out of his wagon; I noticed that some one had gathered up some pieces of the unfortunate brown jug, and placed them high up, on a shoulder of the rock. I saw them lying there many times afterwards; and thought that my friend had probably placed them there, as an affecting memorial.—He might have done a worse thing.