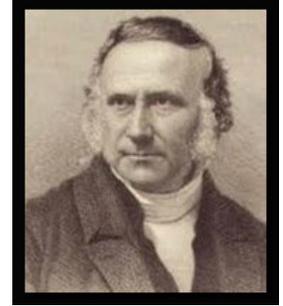


The Heart Promised



One of the most perplexing, and to me distressing instances of continued and ineffectual seriousness, that I have “ever known, was that of a young woman, who seemed to me to be as near perfection, as any person that I have ever known. She was about twenty years old, of good mind, and more than ordinary intelligence. Everybody that knew her loved her. She had been religiously educated, and was of a very sober and thoughtful disposition, though uniformly cheerful. She became interested on the subject of religion, and attended the meeting for religious inquiry, week after week. In personal conversation with her at her house, I aimed repeatedly to remove all her difficulties of mind, and explain to her the way of salvation. She appeared to understand and believe all that was said to her. Her convictions of sin seemed to be clear and deep. That she could be justified only through faith in Christ, she had no doubt. Of his power and readiness to save her, if she would come to him, she had not a doubt. She deeply felt that she needed the aids of the Holy Spirit, and seemed to realize with peculiar solemnity, that the Holy Spirit was striving with her. Her seriousness continued for weeks; and while others around her were led to rejoicing in the Lord, her mind remained without peace or hope. I exercised all my skill to ascertain her hindrances, to show her the state she was in, and lead her to Christ. It was all in vain. There she stood, left almost alone. Her condition distressed me. I had said everything to her that I could think of, which I supposed adapted to her state of mind. I had referred her to numerous passages in the Bible, and explained them to her most carefully. She had no objections to make. She

heard all I said to her, with apparent docility and manifest thankfulness; and yet, she said she was as far from the kingdom of heaven as ever, her heart was unmoved, and enmity against God.

Just at this period, I accidentally met her one morning in the street. I was sorry to meet her, for I thought I must say something to her; I had said all, and I knew not what to say. Offering her my hand, I asked,

“Sarah, have you given your heart to God?”

“No, sir,” said she tremulously.

“Don’t you think you ought to?”

“I know, I ought to.”

“Do you mean to do so?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Don’t you think you ought to do it to-day?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then will you?”

“Yes, I will,” said she, emphatically.

“Goodbye,” said I; and instantly left her.

A day or two afterwards I saw her, and she had wanted very much to see me; she wanted to tell me how she felt, and how she had been affected. She said, that she had never felt so before, that her mind was at

rest—that she now loved God—that his character and law appeared to her most excellent, worthy of all admiration and love —that she could now trust in the blood of Christ, and wondered she had never done it before. She partly hoped, though she scarcely dared to hope, that her heart was renewed by the Holy Spirit.—“But,” said she, “after I made you that promise, I would have given all the world, if I had not made it. I hunted after you to take back my promise; but I could not find you. The thought of it haunted me. It distressed me beyond measure. I wondered at myself for being so rash as to make it; but I dared not break it. I had a dreadful struggle with myself, to give up all into the hands of God; but I am glad of it now.”

“Then you think,” said I, “that you have done something very acceptable to him?”

“Oh no! not I! I have done nothing. But I hope God has done something for me. All I could do, was to tell him I could do nothing, and pray him to help me.”

She united with the church, and yet honors her profession.

This is the only case, in which I have ever led any person to make such a promise. I doubt the propriety of doing it. I did not really intend it, in this instance. I was led into it at the time, by the nature of our conversation, and the solicitude I felt for one, to whom I knew not what to say.

The resolutions of an unconverted sinner are one thing, and the operations of the Holy Spirit are quite another. They may coincide indeed; and if such resolutions are made in the spirit of a humble reliance on God, they may be beneficial: “I will arise and go to my father,” was no improper purpose. But if such resolutions are made in self-reliance, they are rash, and will seldom be redeemed. Sarah seems to have found herself

insufficient for keeping her promise. “All I could do, was to tell him I could do nothing, and pray him to help me.”

If anyone thinks that he has turned to God without the special aids of the Holy Spirit; it is probable, that he has never turned to God at all certainly, he cannot sing, “He sent from above: he took me, he drew me out of many waters; he delivered me from my strong enemy.”