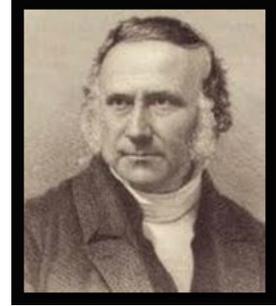


The Obstinate Girl



There are periods, when the minds of unbelievers are more than ordinarily ready to attend to the concerns of eternal life. It is an important duty to improve such seasons. Having called, one morning, upon several young people, and found their feelings tender on the subject of religion, I determined to keep on in this service. I therefore called upon a young woman, who attended my church; and introducing, as gently as I could, the reason which brought me there, I found that her mind was fully set, against any personal attention to her salvation. I reasoned with her, as well as I could, explained to her some texts of scripture, and affectionately besought her, to give immediate attention to the great concerns of a future life.

She replied to it all in a very opposing and insolent manner, which I did not resent in the least. The more impudent she became, the more polite and gentle I became; thinking in this way to win or at least, that she would become ashamed of her want of politeness. But it turned out very differently. My gentleness seemed to provoke her to increased insolence. She found fault with Christians; called them hypocrites; spoke of ministers, as bigoted, and domineering, and proud; and “wondered why people could not mind their own business.” She became personally abusive to myself; and in her abuse, I believe she made some capital hits, as she drew my character. I bore it all, with perfect gentleness and good nature; but tried politely and gently, to persuade her to try to be saved herself, let what would become of the rest of us. Whenever I got an

opportunity, (for she was very talkative,) I answered her objections and cavillings, as briefly as possible, determined to enlist her own reason against her disposition, if I could. For example; she said to me with a bitter sneer:—

“What examples your church members set!”

I answered; “I want you to be a Christian, and set us a good example. You are under as much obligation to set me a good example, as I am to set you one.”

“I have a right to my own way;” says she.

“Then,” said I, “other people must have a right to theirs. But surely, you do not mean to say, you have a right to be wrong. A wrong right is a queer thing.”

“Well, I am sincere, at any rate.”

“So was Paul, when he persecuted the church. He was very sincerely wrong, and afterwards was very sorry for it.”

“I am accustomed to mind my own business.”

“I thought just now you were minding mine, when you talked so freely about me,” said I; “and as to minding your own, let me tell you, your first business is, to seek the kingdom of God.”

“I abhor cant!”

“Those were the words of Christ, that I uttered. I should be sorry to have you call them cant.”

“Oh, you are mighty cool!”

“Yes; I should be very sorry to be angry with you, or injure you, or treat you impolitely. I have no feelings towards you, but those of kindness and good will.”

“You have got all the young people running after you in this excitement, which you call a revival of religion. In my opinion there is not much religion about it! But I’ll tell some of them better. I’ll let them know what you are!”

“You may know me better yourself, perhaps; before you have done with me. And as to the young people, I am happy to know, that many of them are trying to flee from the wrath to come; and if we are mistaken about the matter of religion in this revival, I hope you will become truly religious yourself, and thus give us an example and be prepared to tell us our error.”

In this mode, I aimed to soften her asperities. But for the most part, she took the lead in the conversation, and kept on, with a more abusive talk, than I ever received before.

I took my leave of her, saying I would do myself the pleasure of calling again soon. She replied, with a triumphant air, and with an accent of bitter irony:—“I should be very happy to see you, very indeed!”

After I left her, I thought over the interview, and studied her character, with all the carefulness and penetration I could muster. I knew that sometimes convicted sinners would become opposers, just because they were convicted,—being led to vent upon other people the dissatisfaction they feel with themselves. And in such cases I have always thought it best to treat them with kindness, and aim to overcome their opposition by good will, and by letting them find nothing to oppose. But

I did not think this was her case. She had manifested no dissatisfaction with herself; and though she was “exceeding fierce,” I did not believe she resembled those whom the devils tore, before they came out of them.

This young woman was very rich, having a large property of her own, which she used as she pleased. She lived in the midst of elegance; and several of the expressions which she used while talking to me, appeared to me to indicate that she was proud of her affluence, presumed upon it to give her respectability, and was fully resolved to enjoy the pleasures of the world. The costliness and elegance of her dress rather sustained this idea; which was still farther impressed upon my mind, by my knowledge of the kind of accomplishments she had aimed after, while pursuing her education.

On the whole, I came to a fixed conclusion as to the manner in which I should treat her, if she ever ventured to talk to me in the same manner again. Evidently she felt, that she had triumphed over me, and was proud of her triumph. Little as such a triumph might be, I was afraid the pride of it would still farther harden her; and thus I should have done her an injury. Her mother was a member of my church. I had always treated her and her daughter politely; and I knew, or thought I knew, that the young lady supposed herself able to over-awe me. And if I should allow her to go on in this way, and to feel that she triumphed, she would probably become the more haughty, and hardened, and worldly. However, I rather supposed, that on reflection she would be sorry for what she had said, and be careful not to repeat it again. I very much hoped that she would. But if she should commence such a course again, my duty was plain, and I resolved to aim to discharge it.

Accordingly I called upon her the very next day, and stated to her my desire to have some conversation with her, if agreeable to her, very frankly and kindly, on the subject of her duty to God, and to her own soul. I found her in much the same mood as before. She soon

commenced her abusive style of remark about professors of religion, and ministers, and revivals. I allowed her to go on in her own way, without saying much myself, for about half an hour. I only aimed to pacify her opposition by mildness, and lead her to speak more reasonably, and feel more justly. She seemed to take courage from my forbearance, to be the more bitter and abusive. When I thought the fit time had come, I requested her to pause a little, and just hear what I had to say to her.

I then talked to her as severely as I was able. I told her there was not much truth, and not an item of sincerity in all she had been saying,—that I knew it, and she knew it herself,—that she knew she had been saying things which were not true, and affirming opinions which she did not entertain,—that she was just wickedly acting out the deep-seated and indulged wickedness of her heart against God,—a wickedness which I was surprised to find, had led a lady of her sense and accomplishments to forget the dignity of her sex; and descend to mean and low abuse, of which she ought to be ashamed, and would be ashamed, if she had any delicacy left,—that I had entered her house in a gentlemanly manner, with respectful and kind feelings towards her, and had treated her politely and kindly in every word and action, both yesterday and to-day; while she had disgraced herself and her family by her abuse and coarseness, which were unworthy of anyone who pretended to the least respectability,—that, on my own account, I did not care one atom what she thought of me, or said to me, for she was entirely incapable of hurting my feelings; but that I felt exceedingly sorry for her, to find her acting like a poor, wicked fool, “foaming out her own shame,” and boasting of her sincerity, when there was not an item of sincerity about her,—that, as for her influencing other young people against me, and turning their hearts away from religion, as she had yesterday threatened to do, I would take care to see to that. She might do her worst, I would caution them against her; and any slanders she might utter against me would only exalt me in the opinion of anyone, whose opinion I cared anything about,—that she might indulge her wickedness, and rail against Christians and Christian ministers as long as

she pleased; I never would attempt to stop her again, for if this was to be her course, I was now in her house for the last time,—that I was sorry to speak thus to her,—I had never done it before to any person in my life, and never expected to have occasion to do it again; but I felt it to be my duty now,—a duty which I owed to her own soul, for I had never, in all my experience, witnessed such hardened and silly wickedness as I had seen in her, for which she would soon have to give an account unto God,—that if she had known no better, I could have had some respect for her; but she did know better, she spake what she knew was not so, just indulging the enmity of her heart against God,—that her pride would soon be brought low, and if she did not repent and flee to Christ, the time was not far distant when God would leave her to her own way, and at last she would have her just portion “in shame and everlasting contempt?”

As I went on to speak in this strain, she at first appeared to be taken by surprise, to be utterly confounded, as if she could not believe her own ears. But in a little time, her eyes were cast down to the floor; she buried her face in her handkerchief, and wept and sobbed as a child.

I did not heed this at all. I only continued to speak in the same manner, till I had finished all I had to say. I then told her, that I had done all my duty to her, and was now going to leave her forever. I had only to say, that so far as I was myself concerned in her vituperation, I freely forgave it all, and hoped God would forgive it; but that I very well knew, it all proceeded from her enmity against God, which he only could forgive; and I besought her to seek his forgiveness, before it was too late.

While uttering this severe rebuke, I had stood with my hat in my hand, ready to depart; and when I had finished; I bade her good morning, and turned towards the door. She sprang from her seat, and reaching out both her hands to me, she begged me, with tears coursing down her cheeks, not to leave her so. She began to entreat my forgiveness. I stopped her instantly. “I will not allow you to beg my pardon. You have not

offended me at all. If I have said anything wrong, I will beg your pardon.”
“No, no!” said she, while she clung to my hands in great agitation,
sobbing aloud. Said I, “I must go; if you have nothing to say to me.” Said
she; “I hope you will consent to stay a little longer. Don’t leave me,
don’t leave me. I beg of you to stay.”

I did not intend to stay. But she appeared so overwhelmed, and I
had really talked to her so severely, that I began to relent. I could not bear
to add another burden to her heart.

We sat down, and she immediately thanked me for my plainness
with her, and confessed she deserved it all. She continued to weep most
piteously and with an imploring look she asked me; “what shall such a
poor, wicked creature do?”

I was entirely overcome. I wept with her. I could not avoid it. But I
could not now converse with her. After several attempts I said to her:

“I cannot talk with you now. If you wish it, I will come to see you,
when I am less agitated.”

“Will you come this afternoon?” said she.

“Yes, I will, if you desire it.”

“I do desire it. Now be sure to come. Don’t forget me. Come
immediately after dinner, or as soon as you can. I have much to say to
you.”

I left her. When I returned, in the afternoon, she met me at the
door, bathed in tears. She gave me her hand affectionately, but in silence.
She could not speak. Her proud spirit seemed crushed. She was all
gentleness. As soon as she could subdue her agitation, she expressed her

joy at seeing me. She had been watching for me, and should have gone after me, in a few moments, if I had not come. She thanked me again and again, for what I had said to her. She told me, that when I began to talk to her so plainly in the morning, she was surprised, she did not expect such an address. "But as you went on," said she; "I was confounded. I knew what you said was true; but I was amazed that you should know my heart so well. I thought you knew it better, than I did; and before you had done, if you told me anything about myself, I should have believed it all. It seemed to me, that you just lifted the covering from my heart. I felt myself in a new world. And it does now seem to me, that I am the wickedest sinner, that ever was. Will God have mercy upon me? What shall I do? What can I do?"

I saw her many times after this; and all our intercourse was most kind and pleasant. She sought the Lord and found him. In a few months she united with the church. I knew her for years afterwards, a lovely and consistent Christian, and one of my own most precious friends.

This is the only instance, save one, in which I have ever ventured upon such a course of severity. I do not know as I should do it again. I thought it wise at the time, and the result pleased me exceedingly. After she became a member of the church, and an intimate friend, I conversed with her on the subject of my treatment of her at the time, when she said, I "uncovered her heart;" and she expressed her opinion, that nothing, but such treatment, could have arrested her in her career. She said, that while I was talking to her, at first she perfectly hated me; but before I closed she perfectly despised herself, and feared that God would have no mercy upon her.

There can be no question but the power of the gospel lies in its kindness and love, and that through such affections, rather than the opposite ones, souls are to be wooed and won to Christ. But kindness and love can censure as well as smile. There are circumstances in which

censure is demanded, and duty cannot be discharged without it. And yet, to censure and reprove are things so uncongenial to the love-spirit of the gospel, and are apt to be so congenial to some of the worst feelings of human nature, that few duties are so difficult. None but a truly affectionate believer can wisely trust himself to utter words of severity to those who oppose religion. St. Paul had tears, but no taunts, for the enemies of Christ.