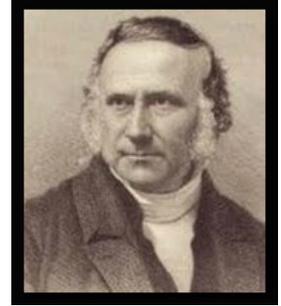


# *The Stormy Night*



The most remarkable instance of protracted and determined perseverance in seeking God, that has ever come within my knowledge, was that of a young married woman, whose seriousness commenced soon after I visited her at her own house, for the first time. The conversation that I then had with her, as she afterwards told me, “led her to make up her mind that she would seek the Lord, and would not stop, till she believed her salvation was secure.” The one consideration, and so far as I could ever ascertain, the only one, which has any special influence to lead her to form this resolution and begin to act upon it, was taken from the assurance I gave her in my first conversation with her, that salvation was within her reach,—that she might be a Christian if she would,—that she would not seek the Lord in vain, if she only sought Him with all her heart. “You told me, sir,” said she to me, years afterwards, “I should not seek God in vain. Your words were (I remember it well and always shall), ‘I know, Mrs. E—, that you will be saved, if you seek God with all your heart.’”

She tried to do so. She came to my house for conversation with me about her salvation, almost every Sabbath evening for nearly two years. In the depth of winter, on a cold, stormy night, the wind blowing violently, the snow drifting into the path, in places more than two feet in depth (as I found on accompanying her home),—one of the most unpleasant and even terrific nights for a woman to be abroad; she came nearly half a mile to my house, alone. As I opened the door for her admission that stormy night, I uttered an expression of surprise, “why, Mrs. E—! are you here on

such a night?" And I shall never forget the severe, deserved rebuke, which she unwittingly gave me, many months afterwards, in reference to that expression." It stumbled me," says she; "I dill not know what to make of it. You bad invited us there, and I thought you would be expecting me. I thought you ought not to be surprised to see me there, if sinners were in danger of the everlasting wrath of God and might escape it, as you had preached that day. It was a long time before I could get over that stumbling-block. I thought, if you half believed what you preached, and felt about it as I did, you would expect to see me. I know it was a stormy night and I was afraid; but I kept thinking as I went, that the day of judgment would bring a worse storm, as you said once in your sermon—'hail-stones and coals of fire.'" This she said to me more than a year afterwards, and after she had attained hope in the mercy of God through Christ Jesus.

At the same time, she told me another thing, which added keenness to her unintentional rebuke. She said, that her husband (at this time an irreligious man), was very unwilling that she should venture out on that stormy night, and strongly urged her to stay at home, when he found she proposed to go. "But," says she, "he told me afterwards that my going to your house that night, was the first thing which brought him to reflection; for he thought there must be something about sin and religion which he did not know anything about, if I would go to your house in such a storm, all alone. I did not know it at that time; but when he told me afterwards, I remembered that he looked very cross when I came home, and I thought he was angry because I went. But I was not going to mind that. I knew I had done rightly, and I was not going to let anything turn me aside from trying to be a Christian. And don't you remember, three Sunday nights after that, he came to your house with me?"

Month after month, this woman's deep anxiety continues I never could discover why she lingered so long in her unbelief. Again and again, I aimed with all possible carefulness to tell her all the truths of the gospel, and to discover what error, sin or temptation, kept her from repentance and peace with God. But I never could discover her hindrance: and she

never could tell me, then or afterwards, of any difficulty or temptation, which had troubled her, except the expression I made to her on that stormy night. And in justice to her I ought to say, that she did not mention that as having been a hindrance, though she called it a stumbling-block; but mentioned it casually and in another connection—not to find fault with me, and not to account for her continuing so long in unbelief. Far from this. she was one of the most modest of women, and one of the most affectionate and devoted friends I ever had. Nothing, I am sure, could ever have tempted her to find fault with me, or utter a syllable with any intent to censure me or wound my feelings. Before that memorable night of storms, when her presence surprised me, she had been for months an anxious inquirer.

It was a most painful and perplexing thing to discharge my pastoral duty to this woman. I could not understand her state of mind. She was frank, she concealed nothing, she told me all her heart, she was desirous of being interrogated. She was, moreover, an intelligent, well-educated woman, and trained in early life by religious parents. But I could not even conjecture what kept her in her unbelief, since, for so long a time, she had known the truth, and had such powerful strivings of the Holy Spirit. And what then could I say to her? how could I hope to do her any good?

She came to me so many times, and I had so many times told her all that I knew about the way of salvation, and so many times presented to her every motive of the gospel, and invited and urged her to cast herself upon Christ, that I did not know what more to say or do; and time after time I was half sorry to see her come into my house, and then ashamed of myself because my heart had such a feeling. I knew not what to do. At one time I was on the point of telling her that I had nothing more to say to her, and she need not come to me again. But I could not do it. She was so miserable, so sincere, so determined, docile, and confiding, that it was impossible for me to cast her off. I afterwards rejoiced that I had not done it. Her husband became pious, her sister, and others of her friends, all of whom began to seek God after she did; and yet, there she stood, the same unhappy, unconverted sinner. She did not advance, and she did not go

back. Time after time I assured her that her lingering was unnecessary, and would gain her nothing,—that she had but to trust herself to the arms of Christ out-stretched to receive her,—that ‘without faith it was impossible for her to please God,’ or gain an item of profit to her own soul. A hundred times I cautioned her most solemnly against putting any trust in her perseverance, for that she was persevering in the wrong course while in her unbelief, and the farther she went, the worse would be her condition. time after time, the Bible in my hand, and she in tears before me, as a minister of God, and on his authority, I offered her a free salvation, and demanded her heart’s faith, and instant submission to divine authority and unbounded love. Her mind, her conscience, her heart, I besieged with all the kindness of Christ. I explained to her such passages of the Scriptures as ‘the marriage which a certain king made for his son,’—and ‘the prodigal,’ who, in a far country, ‘began to be in want.’ All would not do.

As far as I could discover, she had for many weary months a full conviction of all the great doctrines of the Bible, of the entire depravity of her heart, of her sin and danger under the law as a condemned sinner, of the impossibility of her salvation but by Christ, and of the full and free salvation offered to her in the love of God, on the ground of the great atonement. I have never spent half as much time with any other awakened sinner, or uttered to any other one half as many threatenings and promises of God, or kneeled with any other half as many times in prayer. But so far as I know, she never received any benefit from it all, unless that was a benefit which she one day suggested to me long afterwards, when she said, “if you had been discouraged with me, I should have been discouraged,—and should have given up trying to be saved.”

She persevered. She became a child of hope and peace. She united herself with the people of God; and now, after more than thirteen years, she still lives in the enjoyment of Christian hope. Neither she nor I,—yea, nor her husband, will ever forget that stormy night.

Ministers ought never to despair of the salvation of any sinner. To despair of anyone, is just the way to make him despair of himself many

have been ruined in this way probably. We ought to expect sinners to repent,—and treat them accordingly. Who shall limit the Holy One of Israel? It took me long to learn the lesson, but I have learnt never to give up a sinner. We must urge the duty of an immediate faith and repentance, as the Bible does so continually; but we should be careful to enjoin this duty in such a manner, that if it is not immediately done, the individual shall not be led or left to cease seeking God. Many a sinner turns back, when just at the door of heaven.