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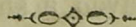
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FORETHOUGHT.

IN TWO DIALOGUES.

BY MRS. CAMERON,

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FORETHOUGHT.

DIALOGUE I.

BETWEEN WILLIAM JONES AND GEORGE TAYLOR.

William Jones is unpacking a basket of nonpareils, and George Taylor is sitting by a round table, near the fire, on which there is a jug of ale, and glasses.

William. THE very nonpareils that used to grow in my father's orchard, and my mother used to give us one, when we were good boys. Happy days those, George! and you used to come in for one as you stood waiting for your jug of milk.

George. There was not a better woman upon the earth than your mother. Many of her sayings I call to mind when I pass through the orchard, where she used to collect her children, and some of the labourers' children, too, on a Sunday, and made us read the Bible to her. You remember those days, Master?

William. Yes, yes! I have not forgotten them, for all I was not then the man I am now, and little thought my father that I ever should. But I am not for boasting, and it would not be seemly, George, to you, as you are but a labourer.

George. Boasting can never be seemly, truly, Master, in one of flesh and blood.

William. It was a capital hit of my father's, to get me into the family of that baronet.

George. I have often thought that the old gentleman did not think so well of it in his latter days, as when he parted with you.

William. Why, man, the proof of the pudding is in the eating;—but I take your meaning. If I had been given to extravagance, I might, surely, have learned enough of that with the old baronet. But I was always one who possessed a good deal of forethought. My master favoured me, it is true, in the matter of the public-house: but I carried my forethought, George, from service, into the public-house, and saved a pound where some would have saved a shilling; else, how could I have left off business so soon, and built such a house as this? [*He walks about the room, with his hands in his pockets, looking round him.*] Do you know any thing of building, George? I will venture to say this is as well-built a house as ever you saw: the walls a brick and half. And the cellar capital: a good cellar goes as far to a good tap as good malt. What do you think of it, George?

George. Why, I do think it is a very handsome-looking house, and that it will stand a great many years longer than ever you'll want it; and I do think this ale so capital that much of it won't do for me, who am used to little else than ordinary cider.

[William comes to the fire, and throws himself down in his chair, and looks hard at George for some time before he speaks.]

William. George, you are the very same man that you were twenty years ago. Not a bit altered.

George. Not altered, Master? I was not grey twenty years ago; and I had no wrinkles in my cheek.

William. But you have the very same way of talking that you used to have—the very same way of putting things. You have not seen the world, as I have: you have lived all your life under an apple-tree.—But now let me hear a little about my brother and his family. It is twenty years since I took my last peep at him. Letters do not tell one much, and I have seldom seen any body that could give me any news about him.

George. It was that which made my master so anxious to send me over with these few apples, to ask after you, as soon as he heard you were got into your new house. I suppose he'll be coming over himself, as soon as his foot is got well.

William. Well, that is but an accident, you say; he is pretty well as to his health?

George. Yes, he is a very young looking man for his age. Younger than you, Master, by some years.

William. May be, he is three years younger, and he has not had so much to think of: he has not got on as I have.

George. No, I suppose not; but he is very comfortable. He has repaired the old house, so that it is a great deal more convenient than it used to be. And his daughters are very fond of the garden, and have their beds of anemones and ranunculuses, and their tulips and rose-bushes, looking quite gay under the window: and they are great bodies for bees, too; and a cleaner house I never saw, for the girls take after their mother.

William. But I suppose my poor brother must work hard; he cannot spend his money as I do. He never had the thought about him that I had; he was too fond of his books.

George. I never saw that he spent too much time in reading. He seldom opens any book but the Bible; and a chapter of that, read in the evening, has done no harm to any of his family. Excuse my speaking bold, Master; you and I have had many a game of play together; and that makes me take liberties: but, as far as I can see, there is no man in the coun-

try has more dutiful children, or more orderly servants, or a better wife than he has; and I have always thought it owing to his manner of instructing his family in the good old way.

William. Well, I have no children; I know nothing of these things. But is my brother's health pretty well? Does he stand his work?

George. His health is good; he rises at four, and works as hard as I do; and it agrees with him well.

William. If he had had as much forethought as I have had, he ought to be looking forward to the time when he might sit down and take his ease, and rest himself.

George. Why, to tell you the truth, he is looking forward to that time; but, may be, not just yet.

William. [*Getting up.*] How? What do you mean? He is not looking forward to my death?

George. To your death! no, that he is not. Never did one brother love another better than he loves you: besides, your eldest brother's children are fittest to be your heirs.

William. Then, what do you mean?

George. Why, certainly, he has an estate in his eye.

William. You puzzle me. I never heard of any expectations my brother had; and though he may have been a very industrious man, and his wife worked hard, and his children be steady, yet, I am quite sure, that, upon that little farm, he never can have realized much; and he never was the man to speculate, though he has had many good opportunities, I understand, of turning a penny.

George. He was always afraid of bringing trouble upon his mind, and ruin upon his family.

William. He was not, I say, a man of forethought, like some I won't name. And pray, then, what do you mean by this estate that he is looking forward to? I have heard of no windfalls.

George. Now, Master, you mistake your brother, when you say that he is not a man of forethought. Perhaps you would think me very bold, if I were to say that I take him to have more forethought than his elder brother.

William. Really, you put me beyond all patience. If I had not known your oddities from a boy, I would shew you the door. What! do you mean to say that my brother has more forethought than I have?

George. Yes, I do think he has; though I would not be too hasty in saying so, because, as yet, I know but little of your ways of going on.

William. Ways of going on? I don't know what you mean; but you have eyes, and can see that I have a capital

house to live in, built with my own money. And I believe that I am not far off the mark, when I tell you that I can spend my sovereign where Edward can spend his crown. Will you, then, say that he has more forethought than I have?

George. Yes, I think I may venture to do it. In the first place, with God's blessing, his farm has produced him every comfort a man, in his habits, can need; and every evening, in his quiet arm-chair, he reaps the fruits of those seeds he has cast in the ground in his early days; whether it be as relates to his health, his peace of mind, or his family. The king is not happier than your brother is, Master; and, when the farm shall fall into his son's hand, he looks forward to coming into possession of a very goodly estate; may be, in thirty years, at furthest; and he would not care if it were a little sooner, for he has been ordering every thing, all his life, with a view to this.

William. Thirty years? Why, you are raving! I shall be dead of old age then; and can he expect to be coming into possession of an estate at that time?

George. Then, it seems, he will be entering upon his estate when you are turned out of yours. Who'll have the most forethought then?

William. You put me beside myself, George. You are either a madman yourself, or you take me for a fool. What do you mean by all this nonsense of estates?

George. Come, now, Master, do not ruffle yourself; I meant no harm: you know I always had the liberty of speaking my mind to you; and I had no inclination to lose it, now you are more unlikely to hear the truth than ever you were before. Cannot you see what I have been driving at all this time?

William. I neither know, nor want to know. I wish you were gone about your business.

George. Nay, Master, be pacified; we must not part enemies, this first time of meeting. Only let me explain myself; and, if my discourse displeases you, I promise you that you shall not hear one word more on the subject.

William. [*Sits down again.*] Well, then, prithee be short.

George. There are not two men in the world, beyond my own sons, that I love as I do you and my master, your brother Edward; and, as we have been partly brought up together, I cannot help using great liberty of speech; and it grieves me to hear you speak of your own forethought, when, in my humble opinion, you are quite without it.

William. [*Jumping up.*] I without forethought! What do you mean?

George. Yes, Master. Is not he without forethought who

lays up a twelvemonth's wages, to spend on the first day of the year, and starves all the rest of it?

William. But I do no such folly.

George. The days of man's life are threescore years and ten; and then follows eternity. Is not that man without forethought, who is always toiling and striving for his threescore years and ten, and never lays up for eternity?

William. And how do you know that I never lay up for eternity? I do not understand your language.

George. If the cap does not fit, Master, don't put it on; but, if it does, do not sit down to take your rest, till, to forethought for time, you add forethought for eternity.

William. And does your master send you across the country to tell me that I am a liar, and a rogue, and a hypocrite? for such he must take me for, to decide in this manner what is to happen to me in another world. Perhaps I may be as good a Christian as he is.

George. My master never sent me over for this errand; he knows no harm, nor thinks any of you; and I am sure no man sets less store by himself than he does. All I say is from my own head; and I am sure I never took you to be a rogue, or a liar, or a hypocrite.

William. Then what do you take me for?

George. I take you to be one, Master, who stands well with the world, and, perhaps, in some respects, with your own conscience. But I take you, Master, since you call upon me to speak, as one who has taken much thought for this world, but little for the next.

William. And is this your way of congratulating me, on coming to live in my own neighbourhood again? Pretty kindness! pretty civility, this!

George. Yes, Master, it will be kindness, indeed, if I can lead you back to those principles of truth and piety, in which your good parents brought you up, and persuade you to rest in the Saviour, and not in any thing which you think you have wrought yourself, either for soul or body. God grant my poor feeble words may be thus blessed. You have now done with business: you will have time, in this nice quiet house, to read your Bible—to pray and meditate. O, my good Master, make use of these advantages! learn to know yourself, and your need of a Saviour, till you have a better prospect for eternity than you now have for time: that is the true forethought; and then, like your brother, you will be able to rejoice in the good hope, that,—

“When death turns you out of this cottage of clay,
You shall dwell in a palace in heaven.”

DIALOGUE II.

BETWEEN WILLIAM JONES AND HIS BROTHER,
EDWARD JONES.

William Jones is sitting in an arm-chair, propped up by pillows; and, upon his round table, there stands physic, and a spoon, and cup.

Edward. II LITTLE thought, at our first meeting, to find you in this condition. I had hoped, if it pleased God, that, now we were to be neighbours, we might often meet, and spend much happy time together.

William. You might have found me worse, though it is bad enough. Hardly any hope, brother; hardly any hope.

Edward. Hope of recovery do you mean, William?

William. Yes; hope of recovery from worse than the apoplexy—hope of recovery from despair and perdition.

Edward. Fear not, my brother; if you desire recovery, there is one step taken towards it. God has given you a season for repentance, and it is his will that you should use it.

William. [*Sighs deeply.*] I have been a grievous sinner, Edward; and, though I have mistrusted things were wrong, yet, I never properly laid them to heart, till after I had that first fit of apoplexy, the night I had the house-warming. O, Edward, I shall never forget that night.

Edward. Thank God that you were spared to remember it.

William. I can hardly look upon that stroke, except as an act of vengeance from God; for I think I sinned in that affair of the house-warming, as much, if not more, than I did in any act of my life, because I sinned with my eyes open.

Edward. What had opened your eyes?

William. I must go back a long way. You remember, Edward, how our poor mother brought us up; and, in some sense, I may say I lived in the fear of God till I went to service. Ah, if my poor father had chosen me a place where God was served, let it have been among the poor in the land, it would have been far better for me.

Edward. I believe he often repented what he had done.

William. But what is the use of throwing the blame upon other people's shoulders? I might have done better if I would; that I am sure of. But the love of the world soon stifled the voice of conscience in me. The desire to do as others do, and to be in credit with my fellow-creatures, was always my besetting sin; and, to make short of my history,

the same disposition that made me follow pleasure and gaiety when I was young, made me desire money when I was old. There is often, I believe, but one step from the love of pleasure to the love of money. When I left my service, and got into the public-house, my whole mind was set upon getting money: and I made no scruple of breaking the Sabbath, or driving a hard bargain, or drinking a little too much with my customers, if I could turn a penny by it. My business, at that time, took me, once or twice a year, to this village; and I was much taken with it, for I was at all times fond of green fields and trees; and I set my mind upon buying a bit of ground here, and building a house, and living at my ease.

Edward. And had you in view, too, in laying aside business, to spend the evening of your life in better things?

William. I will not say much of that; though, certainly, I used to quiet my mind, as I stayed away from church Sunday after Sunday, by the thought that I should have plenty of time, by and by, to take care of my soul. But, to go on, every thing seemed to favour my worldly concerns, and, by the time I was fifty, I had laid up money enough to leave off business; and this bit of land, facing the street, and running down to the church, being on sale, I lost no time in buying it, and I set about building the house directly, so that it was nearly ready for occupation by the time I could get the public-house off my hands. So then, to this village I came, and finished my house, and planted and fenced my garden, in as good a style, and perhaps better, than any man about here, in my station. But what, it seems, *was* the purpose of my building this house, and coming to this village? What, but that I should lay my bones to rest in yonder church-yard?

Edward. There was another reason, William, for your coming here. No doubt, it was designed in mercy, that you should be taught the vanity of every thing in this world.

William. Ah, I have learned, now, that I never had any forethought but for this world.

Edward. It seems you had some serious thought of this before the house-warming. What led you to it?

William. The first thing that put any serious thoughts into my mind, was the discourse of George Taylor, whom you sent to see me, with a little present of apples.

Edward. Ah, when I had that accident with my foot, which confined me so long. He is a plain-spoken, sensible man; and few poor men can set the truth in a clearer light.

William. His behaviour was such a disappointment to me! I thought, in my foolish heart, that he would so look up to me, and so admire my house and my garden, that his manner

of speaking quite enraged me. I could not complain that he wanted respect for me, considering that we had been boys and playfellows together, and he was kind and friendly enough: but there was something about him which made me feel that I was in the wrong, and I never lost this feeling from the time that I parted with him.

Edward. And did this alter your behaviour?

William. Not at all; only it kept me uneasy, and prevented me from enjoying myself. Again, I heard very searching sermons at the church; and, for three Sundays, I stayed away from church on that account.

Edward. Ah! that was a bad thing.

William. Then I began to consider that it would not do for me to keep from church, for all the bettermost people are very regular in their attendance here; even those among them who have no religion in their hearts are in the habit of going once in the day. So that to keep up a fair show in the place, it would not do to stay away altogether; and my principles, dark as they were, would not consent to it. And while these things were passing in my mind, the clergyman himself called upon me, and very free and pleasant he made himself. And he looked at my house and garden, and I have no doubt saw the pride of my heart; for he said many things to me in this and several other visits he paid me relative to my keeping the Sabbath, reading my Bible, and setting a good example in the place. But nothing made so deep an impression upon my mind as his saying seriously to me, (I forget what foolish speech of mine led to it,) "I have often remarked, that when persons have just completed some favourite object, have built themselves a good house, and promised themselves some years of worldly enjoyment, that it has pleased God of a sudden to call their souls away." The words rung in my ears for a long time, and still do, as if quite fresh said. From that time I attended church regularly once a day, and sometimes read my Bible; but, at the same time, becoming more acquainted in the place, I indulged myself more than ever in ale and in what I called good company. And thus I went on till my house was painted, and I had quite done with workmen; and then some of my acquaintance told me that I must invite my neighbours and have a house-warming. Now, I knew well what would follow upon such an occasion, and for some little time I doubted about it, but, at last, I yielded. And, having once silenced my conscience, I determined that, for once, all should go on as I thought would best please my company.

Edward. It is easy to guess how that would be.

William. My dinner was plentiful, and my ale was capital. We had song after song, and jug after jug, till my conscience and sense were quite drowned and my memory was almost gone. The last things that I recollect were some free jests cut upon our parson, and even upon religion itself. I remember laughing loud, when, suddenly, I felt a horrible sickness with a swimming and dizziness in my head, and something like a gleam of light flashed before my eyes. I believe at that moment I fell upon the ground, and I have no recollection of any thing more, till I seemed suddenly to awake out of a deep and frightful sleep, and found myself propped up in my arm chair near the window which was set open. An old woman was bathing my head with vinegar, and my servant was crying piteously while she held a bason for the surgeon who was bleeding my arm. The table on which we had dined, with the chairs standing in confusion round it, remained just as my company had left it. It was covered with half-empty glasses, and jugs, and tobacco-pipes. As I looked at it, the remembrance of what had been going on came full upon my mind, and with it the horrid thought that God had at last overtaken me for my wickedness, and that I had sinned beyond recovery. I cannot tell you, Edward, what I went through then, for you have never sinned as I have done by stifling the voice of conscience.

Edward. Ah, William, if we were all to be dealt with as we deserve, there is not one of us that would escape the vengeance of God, and what you suffered at that time was not from the vengeance but the mercy of God. But finish your account. Tell me what happened next.

William. I remained without hope either as to mind or body for some time longer, I cannot tell you how long. Indeed, I might say that I am still almost without hope. My sands are run, but my work is not concluded; the summer is come, and the harvest is past, and I am not saved.

Edward. But, William, my beloved brother, there is mercy for the chief of sinners: not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace, through faith, are we saved.

William. I do not despair, brother, and that is all I can say. But indeed I *was* in a state of despair till I had been visited by our clergyman, that very man whom I was in the act of mocking when I was overtaken by this dreadful seizure.

Edward. You would not have mocked him in your sober senses.

William. But what a sin it must be to put myself in such a state that I knew not what I said, and to do that, too, with my eyes open.

Edward. It is very true: but how did your good clergyman give you comfort?

William. It was by setting before me the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and by shewing me that I have been a sinner in thought, word, and deed, all my life long; and that this last act which lies upon my conscience was but the ripe fruit of a bad tree from a bad stock.

Edward. But, William, these are truths which you have learned from your cradle.

William. But truths not applied and put into practice seem quickly to pass from the mind, yet, may be, my heart receives them now the more easily, because, in some sense; I had taken them in with my mother's milk.

Edward. But, surely, William, since you did receive these truths, and, as you say, have derived comfort from them, you ought not to sink again into despondency.

William. A heart, long estranged from God and long practised in sin, is very slow in understanding his love; for God's ways are not like our ways.

Edward. Yes, we need the Spirit of God to soften our hearts, and to enable us to receive those doctrines which teach how good God is, and how vile man is; but faith is given as an answer to prayer.

William. I often feel comfort in our clergyman's prayers by me, and then again it passes away like a cloud; and, as to myself, it was some time before I could frame my heart to pray at all though I could use forms with my lips, but God in his goodness has lately shewn me how to cry from my heart, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Edward. It is the Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and shews them unto us; it is the Spirit who convinceth of sin; it is the Spirit who teacheth us to cry, Abba, Father. This is all one and the same work, however it may be begun in the soul. If you have been convinced of sin, brother, fear not, all the rest will follow in due time. It is a divine work; only persevere, and do not let Satan, or the world, or the flesh, drive you from your strong hold.

William. What you say is very comfortable indeed, and to hear from your mouth the very same truths which I hear from our clergyman seems to give me still more hope that I may apply them to myself.

Edward. Do not doubt, brother, do not fear, but place your whole dependence on your Saviour, and rejoice in him.

William. Ah, Edward! this is not reaping time with me, I cannot carry forth my sheaves with joy as you can.

Edward. Be content, then, brother, if you are sowing in tears, anon the harvest will come.

William. I fear, lest, if I should recover my health in any degree, my old companions should come about me.

Edward. Come then back with me, and hide yourself for a while where these companions cannot find you, and who knows but your native air may do good also to your body?

William. If the doctor permits me, and if I am not called to finish my journey before, I will gladly return, for a while, with you; and, though I left my home as a stout-hearted young man, I will return as a young child.

Edward. A babe in the school of Christ: and, when, brother, you shall have gained a little more experience in this school, you may return here, to live to your Master's glory.

William. Ah! Edward, I have often planned, in former days, that I would send for our nephew, our poor eldest brother's son, to live with me, because I had heard that he was thoughtlessly disposed. And I had planned that I would teach him how to make and to keep money, that so he might not throw away, in extravagance, what I had saved with care. But, now, brother, if I should ever be spared to lead a new life, I will try to teach him what is the true forethought.

Edward. And that, brother, I take to be this:—to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, trusting that all needful things shall be added unto us; using, however, all lawful diligence and prudence in our calling. And I believe the chief reason why godly men ever seem to fail in this, is, that their prudence is too much of a worldly sort, savouring of covetousness, or that they are wanting in diligence.

William. May be, you are right. All I can at present say, is, that I know I have been always wrong. And what have I to do with laying plans for health? who knows whether I ever shall be well again? There is but one step, perhaps, between me and death. Help me, brother, to make good use of my remaining moments.

Edward. I will not leave you till I see how things are likely to go with you: indeed, I hope I shall not, till I can carry you back with me.

William. Or, till you follow me to the house appointed for all living.

Edward. However it may go with you, in those respects, I trust all will be well, now, since I hope you have found at last the pearl of great price.

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