

THE FISHERMAN'S STORY.



IF you had known me six months ago, I think you would have said, what I am sure would have been the truth, that I was the wickedest man in Stanton. I was a bad husband, a bad father, and a bad neighbour; and I never called upon God but in oaths and curses; so you may think that I knew what misery was. And, what with my drunken ways and my savage temper, my poor family had no better than a dog's life, for they had little to eat and less to wear, and the only abundance in our house was of abuse. When I felt worse put out than usual, it gave me a bit of relief to lay the blame on somebody else; and many a kick and a brutal word did my wife and little Jessie—the eldest girl—get, until at last, when they heard me

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coming into the house they would tremble as if it had been a wild beast.

But there was just one thing that had a little check on me, and that was a good mate I had. I was a fisherman by trade, and this man went shares with me in the same boat; and many a night, when we were out in the darkness, he has said a solemn word to me about my soul; and though the only answer he ever got was an oath, yet his words stuck by me and hove me to, in spite of myself.

One night—I shall never forget it, it was in the summer time, and everything was calm and quiet—Tom sat in the stern-sheet after we had cast our nets, reading a tract. When he had finished it, he passed it over to where I was lolling and lounging, smoking my pipe, and wondering what was the use of folks coming into the world to be as miserable as I was just then; for the quiet around us and the sight of Tom's face made me feel like a cat with its coat stroked up the wrong way.

"There, Ned," he said, "that'll suit thee."

I don't know how it was that I took it, for I had always refused before when he offered me a bit of reading. I suppose it was that anything seemed better to me at that time than my gloomy thoughts; but before I knew it I was quite taken up with the tract. It spoke about the Lord Jesus in such a plain way, and told about a poor man who had been trying to find pleasure in sin, as I had, and of course he couldn't: and then he was so happy when he heard that Jesus had died for him; and he got his sins pardoned, and lived such a different life afterwards. I had never read anything like that tract before, my heart seemed well nigh all in pieces. I can't tell you how I felt; but when I got to the end, I turned back to the first page, and began it over again.

Tom was praying for me all the time, I make no doubt; and in a few minutes more, without

thinking of him or anything else, and indeed without very well knowing what I was doing, I was on my knees in the boat, praying for myself. Oh, how pleased Tom was! and he was just the chap to help me, now that I wanted to seek the Lord Jesus; for he had been much in the same way himself, and could tell me how and where to look for Him.

And the Lord didn't take much finding either; He had been knocking long enough and loud enough at my heart, and so he was there, quite ready to come in as soon as ever I was willing. And when I found how comfortable and happy He made me, you may depend on it I thought how foolish I had been that I had kept him out so long. And when his good presence came into my heart, it turned me round from all my savage, selfish feelings, so that something within me seemed to be saying, "Ned, my lad, you'll have to be a different man at home after this;" and, with my heart almost broken with shame and sorrow for the past, I said, "Ay, ay; Lord, help me!"

It was half-past five o'clock when I got home that morning; and little Jessie was downstairs, and had the fire lighted, ready to make me a cup of tea if I chose to have one before I went to bed. She was a good girl, and always did her duty to me; but I often wonder now however she had kept on at it so long; many a bairn would have turned stupid under the treatment she got. And when I came in that morning and went straight up to her, it troubled me to see how the poor bit thing trembled, and how white she looked. If I hadn't felt before that I had been worse than a brute, I felt it then, you may be sure. I didn't strike her, as she expected; but I took her in my arms and kissed her—the first time I had kissed her for a longful while.

I suppose she looked mazed enough, but I didn't wait to see, for I made my way to the room above, where my poor wife was in bed with the baby

in her arms. She had heard me coming, and was trembling too; but I went up to her, and the tears were rolling down my cheeks fast enough, as I stooped down and kissed her. "Mary," I said, "I've often beat thee, and cursed thee, but by God's help I'll never do it any more, for the Lord Jesus has converted my soul."

Oh, what a look she gave me! If any of you husbands have been neglecting and ill-treating your wives, and want a bit of real pleasure, I'd advise you to try and get a look like the one my Mary gave me that morning; it's worth all the old bad ways twice over, I can tell you.

And the Lord Jesus has been a good Friend to me ever since. He has helped me to keep true to him, and to keep my promise to my wife; and if you saw her to-day, you'd say she's as comely and tidy a working man's wife as anybody need wish to see; and she has a good warm winter shawl, and a Sunday dress and bonnet, and the children all go to the Sunday school neatly dressed; and I have a good Sunday suit. You might have rummaged the house through and through, and not caught sight of anything of the kind in it six months ago. So you won't wonder at my giving you all a bit of advice taken out of my own experience. If you want a happy home, and a thriving family, and an easy mind, go to the Lord Jesus. His terms may seem hard at first, for he will tell you that drinking and swearing, and Sabbath-breaking, and selfishness are all to be thrown overboard; but if you only agree to them you'll find it pays well. And the longer you are in his service the more you'll see that he spoke a true word when he said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."