

PRAY, WORK, AND WAIT.



SOME years ago, and on a farm reclaimed from one of the wildest wastes of Aberdeenshire, I became acquainted with a young ploughman, William J——. He was one day driving the horses of a thrashing-mill, when I joined him, and said, “You have time for thought here, William, while your horses do their work.”

“Yes, sir,” he frankly replied, “more than I make a good use of.”

“Do your thoughts,” I asked, “ever turn upon God’s great love to man, while you are thus employed in thrashing the corn His bounty has supplied?”

“I think a great deal more how these four poor beasts are to thrash those forty ricks,” he answered, pointing to the stack-yard.

Narrative Series. No. 1185.

"It is good and right of you to think of the poor horses, William," I rejoined, "since they cannot think for themselves; but, in considering them, you must not forget yourself. And do you not sometimes think of God's great love to you?"

"Sir," he said, "there was never but one man who made me think about that matter, and that's three summers ago; but never another will do it."

"William," I replied, laying my hand upon his shoulder, "it was not the man who moved you, it was God's Spirit? but you have not obeyed Him?"

"I don't know," he answered, doggedly, "whether it was God's Spirit or no; but I was anxious about my soul then, and desired to speak to the minister, but had no opportunity; and I don't care now. I know I am wicked, but I do not feel much put out about that."

I spoke to him kindly and faithfully, but my words seemed as an idle tale. Still I felt my heart in an especial manner drawn towards him; and I went alone, and laid his case before the Lord. Day by day my desire for his salvation increased. Many an hour I spent with him in conversation and prayer; but all, it seemed, to no purpose. His answer to all my entreaties was—"I cannot believe."

One sabbath evening, I had been holding a protracted religious service, at which William was present. I felt so oppressed about him that I could not retire to rest until I had once again explained to him the plan of salvation, and urged him to seek the Saviour. I went to his bed-room, which was over the stable, and found him awake. He told me, that he felt certain I should come to him before I went to bed. The room was dark, and I could not see his face, but—"Willie," I asked, "tell me how it is that you do not give your heart to God? You may try to make me believe that you are indifferent to religion, but I am persuaded you are striving against deep convictions. Are you not?"

He did not speak ; but I heard him sob. "William," I resumed, "tell me candidly, why you do not come at once to the Saviour?"

"I cannot," he replied.

"Nonsense, Willie," I said ; adding, "You can if you will. Prove your inability by trying."

"I am sure I cannot, sir," he persisted. "It's no use trying : I cannot come of myself."

"My dear fellow," I answered, "Jesus never asked you to come of yourself. He knew you never would or could come of yourself ; therefore He has given His Holy Spirit to awaken you to a sense of your need, and to lead you to Himself, and He has sent me to plead with you to come. Now, do come to-night. Hear what He says : 'Behold, now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation : ' and 'Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out.' Come with me now to the throne of grace. This is the last time I may ever speak to you ; perhaps the last time Jesus may ever speak to you ; and oh, William ! think through how long an eternity you will have to regret your folly, if you be cut off in your sins, and lost ! I leave to-morrow ; but I will pray for you, and write to you soon. Now let us pray together."

We knelt down together, side by side, and while I prayed with him, I heard him weep. As I took his hand to bid him good-bye, he said, "I know you love me. I wish I were like you. But there is no use trying. I cannot believe. I have grieved God's Holy Spirit. I am a lost man, you need neither pray for me nor write to me. It's of no use."

I answered : "I will never cease to pray for you so long as I know you to be alive and unconverted. Good-bye, and God bless you."

A day or two afterwards, I wrote to William, and sent him a copy of a valuable little book, which I hoped might make the way of life, through the blood of Jesus, plain to him. He wrote and thanked me

for the book, and for the deep interest I took in his welfare, adding, that he "wished to be saved, but could not believe."

Having occasion to be in that neighbourhood again the following spring, I called upon him. He was in the stable grooming his horses; and as it was his dinner hour, he asked if I would go into the hay-loft with him, which I did. While there, he told me that ever since the meeting in the bed-chamber he had been seriously impressed about his soul's salvation, but that he could not pray. "I am afraid to speak to God now," he said, "seeing I have abused His grace so long."

I urged him then and there to cast himself upon the kind mercy of God in Christ. But he would not. He said he could not. I prayed with him, and again urged him; but no, he would not pray. I then rose to leave. Taking him by the hand, I said, with an earnestness that made him start to his feet, "William! if you are damned, you will cry out for mercy *then*, but your prayers will be in vain. You will find out then, when it is too late, that you might have been saved if you would have prayed while on earth. You can as easily pray to God as a hungry child can ask for a crust of bread. Only you choose rather to die than ask for the Bread of Life. You say you cannot pray. Tell God that, and ask him to help you. Make a prayer, and not a wicked excuse, of your helplessness, and God will have mercy upon you. I must now leave you; good-bye."

Four months passed before I saw William again; but meanwhile I had written to him, and prayed for him constantly. One Sunday evening, while resting after a hard day's labour, I was seized by an uncontrollable desire to pray for him. I poured out my soul before God; and so deep was the impression produced upon my mind, that I felt certain some favourable change had taken place in William's heart.

Next morning, I borrowed a horse and rode ten miles through sleet and rain to see him. I found him at the plough, for the storm had spent itself, and I told him how I had been impressed concerning him, and how far I had come to see him and speak to him once more about Jesus. He was amazed, and said he could not understand love like that. I found, however, that no change had taken place in his heart, and I felt discouraged. But thinking the present time favourable for producing serious thought in his mind, I renewed my efforts:—

"William," I said, "you seem astonished at my coming all this distance, on such a day as this, to speak to you about your soul's salvation; you think I love you very much for doing so. You are not wrong, William; I do love you; but I will show you greater love than this. God's Son came all the way from His glorious throne in heaven to this guilty earth, and died on the cross—not only to speak to men of heaven, but to save men from hell, by suffering in their stead. He bled and died for you, so great was His love; and my little love, which you think so much of, has only brought me here to tell you of this greater love. You have hitherto rejected this love. It almost breaks my heart to see you as far, and farther, from the kingdom of heaven this afternoon as you were when I spoke to you nine months ago!"

"I believe," he said, as he wiped away a tear, "that I *am* farther away now than I was then. I have no hope of mercy. God has left me. I have grieved away His Spirit. He will not pardon me. I cannot believe that He will."

"William, the Bible says 'Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' And he Himself, says, 'He that believeth on me shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life.'"

"Yes!" he answered, almost fiercely; "there it

is,—‘*them that believe.*’ I know if I could believe all would be well ; but I cannot believe !”

After praying with him, I took leave of him.

Soon after this interview I heard that William was about to leave his situation ; and, fearing lest he might be led away still farther, by falling into bad company, I secured a place for him in a godly family. Having made all needful arrangements about work and wages, I again borrowed my friend’s horse, and went to see him. I found him this time following the harrows. I told him of the arrangement I had made for him, and asked him if he would accept it. He was pleased ; and said I could do with him what I liked. After explaining my motives for wishing him to go to the situation I had found him, I again urged him to give himself to the Saviour.

He said he had begun to pray, but that he was not really better than before, and that he still kept on sinning. I told him that Jesus did not come to save His people *in* their sins, but *from* their sins, and urged upon him the necessity of believing upon Him for salvation from sin and from its fearful consequences. He still clung to his old delusion,—he could not believe.

“Now, William,” I said, “don’t speak so. You can believe if you will. You have no doubt as to the certainty of the arrangements that I have made for you when you leave your present master ; you will give yourself no more trouble about a situation, because you trust my word. You believe my bare word because you are sure I would not tell you a lie. Can you not as firmly trust the word of Christ, that He has made every provision for your salvation.” He asks you to trust Him,—to take Him at His word. For ‘He that believeth on me,’ He says, ‘hath everlasting life.’” After making a few more remarks I remounted my horse and returned home.

William entered his new situation, and it so happened that at that time I was visiting his master,

and holding religious meetings in the neighbourhood. William went to them all, and seemed very thoughtful; but no real change took place in his heart. Deep interest was awakened for him in the minds of many Christians, and many prayers were offered on his behalf.

At the last service I held, when I referred to my going away on the morrow William abruptly left the meeting and went home. By the time we reached the house he had gone to bed; but, as I was leaving early, I went to his room to bid him good-bye. The door was ajar. He was still awake, waiting for me, knowing, as he said, that I should come and see him before I left.

"Willie," I said, "if you trusted and loved Jesus Christ as firmly and truly as you trust and love me, you would be saved." I then asked him how he expected to meet God at the great judgment day, after having resisted so much love. "William," I continued, "I may never see you on earth again; will you meet me at the right hand of God?" He made no answer.

After waiting for a while in silence, I said, "William, I have never ceased to pray for you since the day you were driving the horses in the thrashing-mill. I must now bid you good-bye; shall it be for ever: is it for ever, William?"

He still was silent, but when I rose to leave he held fast my hand, and said, "Do not go; your presence has a power for good upon me. If you leave me I shall go back and be as bad as ever; I am sure I shall; and I shall be lost." He could say no more; but he leaned his head upon my shoulder and wept, and I thanked God for giving him the desire for salvation. When I had done praying, he said, "Ah! you have been a true friend to me; but your love has been thrown away. I am not changed; I never shall be. I cannot believe; and the Bible says that without faith it is impossible

to please God." I tried again to point him to Jesus. And I spoke of the Spirit of grace so freely given to all that ask it. I assured him that I should never cease to write to him and pray for him, so long as I knew he was alive and unsaved; then, with a heavy heart, yet not despairing, I left him.

Next morning I removed from T—, and have never seen William since; but I afterwards learned that he had given up the situation I had obtained for him, and plunged into every kind of folly and sin. At length every clue to him was lost. Meanwhile I went to reside in England. And will not the reader sympathise with the joy I felt, when, one morning, I received a letter in the handwriting of my lost friend William, containing these words:—

"You thought you would never lose sight of me, but I wandered out of your way. But I believe you have given the Lord no rest about me; and the Lord has given me no rest till I believed His word. Old things are passed away now, and all things are become new. I have forsaken my old sinful pleasures, and joy only in the cross of Christ now. I drank of the cup of the world till I could drink it no longer. The sting of an awakened conscience would not be drowned. But now I have lasting peace,—Jesus is mine."

Thus it is that we sometimes have "need of patience that after we have done the will of God we might receive the promise." "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain." "Be ye also patient." But "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Meanwhile, let us "PRAY, WORK, AND WAIT."