

THE KING'S SON;

OR,

A MEMOIR OF BILLY BRAY.

CHAPTER X.

REBUKE AND EXHORTATION.

“If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it? and shall He not render to every man according to his works?”—Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

“BILLY,” writes a friend, “was so completely absorbed with a desire to do good—so fired with zeal for the honour of his Divine Master—so full of pity towards his fellow-men—so saved from the fear of man which bringeth a snare—and so impressed with an habitual sense of God’s presence and favour, that, without regard to position, or rank, or character, or circumstances, he was ever ready to testify of the reality and blessedness of religion, or to administer such reproof, or counsel, or warning as he deemed necessary. At one time he might be seen in the midst of a group of pleasure-seekers, seeking to impress them with the idea that real and lasting pleasure was to be had only in religion; at another time he might be found in the midst of an angry, quarrelsome party, striving to conciliate by kind entreaties and loving arguments, or perhaps on his knees, asking God to be merciful, and soften the hearts of the angry ones, calling them by name; and anon you might have seen him accosting strangers, whom he met on the roads or in the streets, or bailing certain persons with whose characters and peculiar tendencies he appeared quite familiar, and abruptly, some fastidious person might say even rudely, but always cheerfully and lovingly, saying something about Christ and His salvation.”

His wonderful tact and address in speaking to friends and strangers personally, whether it came by nature or grace, or in part from one and in part from the other, was certainly one of the most marked features of his character. And yet he did not belong to that class of men who have been called “religious *chatterers*.” He had “such an insight into people,” he had “such a sense of times and seasons,” he had “such a power of putting the truth in an available form, that men could take it without hesitation, and digest it, as it

were.” He seemed to be one of those “unordained men that are ordained of God from their birth to be teachers in this way.” His heart seemed to take such “hold of persons,” as led him to “think about them, and pray for them, and brood over them” with the tenderest, purest affection and sympathy. But his talents were multiplied by the wise and benevolent use he made of them; and to persons who say. “I have not the power he had; and if I had I should not know how to use it,” it may be said, as has been said in a similar case, “But it does not follow you ought not to learn; for the *learning* is very essential.” The church needs the power to preach to individuals, and to preach, as did her Divine Lord, her best sermons, too, on such occasions.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” We may best learn what this means by an example. Billy says, “At the time I was building Bethel Chapel, I knew a very good man, but who had a very wicked woman for his wife. She persecuted him in various ways, sometimes by throwing water in his face. One day she provoked him so much that he swore. He at once keenly felt that he had grievously sinned. Very earnestly did he ask the Lord to have mercy on him, Satan busily telling him all the while that it was no use to pray, for no one would believe in him again. When I was working about the chapel the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘Go up and restore thy brother.’ So I threw down the shovel that I was working with, and away I went to his house. When I got there his wife began to curse him, and to tell me what her husband had said. When she had done I told her what the Lord said to the Jews when the woman was taken in adultery, ‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.’ I asked the husband to walk out with me. I then said, ‘Is not the devil telling you that it is no use to pray, and that nobody will believe in you any more?’ ‘Yes,’ he said. Then I told him that the dear Lord had sent me to him, and that He was on his side, and that I was on his side, and while I was talking to him the dear Lord sent another brother to encourage him. And on the following Sunday the darkness was all dispersed, he regained the blessing he had lost, lived and died trusting in the Saviour, while his wife, continuing to harden her heart, and make the path of her husband rough and difficult, was soon removed by death, to answer, at the judgment-seat of Christ, for all that she had done.”

“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” Billy had learnt the meaning of this Scripture also. When he was out one Sunday beating up recruits for the evening service, he met with a man “who used to say that though Jesus was a good man, He had not all power, and that there was no such being as the devil; there was, he said, no other devil than the wickedness that was in man. He was a

scholar, and thought to be a very wise man. One day when he was arguing that there was no devil, and that all a man had to mind was his own wicked heart, I asked *him what wickedness it was that went into the swine* and drove them over the cliff? He asked me how it was that the Lord suffered the swine to be driven over the cliff? And I said to him, for two reasons, it seems to me, First, to show the *power* of God; and then to show the *envy* of the devil, who would *rather go into the swine than nowhere*. Then he said, ‘ You nearly always beat me.’ But since we used to argue like that the Lord has made him a new creature, one of the many whom Billy turned to righteousness.”

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he will make even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Mr. Wooldridge says, “An old gentleman once took great umbrage at Billy’s faithful reproofs and lively manner in giving prominence to divine things in every day life, and at last he became all but inveterate in his hatred to one who strove to acknowledge God in all his ways. But when affliction overtook him, and death and judgment and eternity appeared close at hand, he found that his lamp gave neither light nor warmth. The happy Christian man, the once dreaded enemy, in the same sense as Elijah was the enemy of Ahab, was now sent for, to do for the unhappy man what David did for Saul, play upon his harp, so that the evil spirit of melancholy might depart from him. On Billy’s entering the sick chamber, looking around on the costly furniture, he spoke aloud, and yet as if he were speaking to himself, ‘Did Jesus Christ ever occupy such a fine place as this? or spend money to gratify fleshly desire and worldly taste?’ Then, in a strain of tenderness and pity, he began to commiserate Jesus on His deep poverty while sojourning here below, till the bystanders were annoyed, and the old gentleman flushed with indignation and wrath. But when Billy had, as he thought, probed the wound enough, he applied the healing balm. And while he was praying, a sweet peace stole over the sufferer’s mind and greatly comforted his troubled heart. Billy was now asked to stay with the sick man until his departure hence, which was not till two or three weeks afterwards. Billy had some of the sorest conflicts he ever experienced during that time, but in every instance he came off victorious through the blood of the Lamb, was more than a conqueror through Him that loved him. The old gentleman, too, again and again lost his hold of God, but Billy as often rendered the help which the poor man who lay so long at Bethesda’s pool so much needed. He kept him whom he had under his care in contact, as it were, with the truth, and the Spirit, and the Saviour, till his mind underwent a complete transformation. At last he could no longer doubt that the day of eternal brightness and joy had dawned, for the ‘day-star had arisen in his heart.’ The light of the ‘city that hath no need of the sun’ shone all around, and without a cloud he passed away to his home in the skies. Billy left the house early one summer’s morn, with the last practical proof of the old gentleman’s gratitude in his pocket,

when he met an absent son from a distance on his way to see his father. To his inquiry how he was, Billy joyfully answered, ‘Never so well in all his life, for he is just gone off with the beautiful shining ones!’” Shall we be forgiven if we say here that a little boy once said to his mother that he “reckoned there would be a pretty row in heaven when his father and Billy Bray got there;” and at another time that he thought Billy Bray would never get to heaven, “because he would kick the angels so much while they were carrying him up that they wouldn’t carry him any further, but let him fall.” While the child’s fears may excite a smile, we know that Billy’s happy spirit, once released from the burden of the flesh, did, as it were with one bound, enter into the joy of his Lord.

In January 1867, Billy went to Plymouth and Devonport to hold some meetings for the Primitive Methodists, for he was no bigot, and was willing to serve all to the best of his ability, because he loved all them that loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. They had *blessed* meetings, rather noisy too. A man reproved Billy in the street for making so much noise. He spoke very sharp, and said “he did not mind who heard him. He was not ashamed to *do* his Master’s work out in the street, and I am sure we who love the Lord ought not to be ashamed to praise Him in the chapel. I told the man that I did not fear him, nor his black-faced master; and if I had hearkened to such as he I should have lost my best friend long ago. My best friend is the dear Lord; He has made me *glad*, and no one can make me *sad*; He makes me *shout*, and there is no one who can make me *doubt*; He it is that makes me *dance* and *leap*, and there is no one that can keep down my *feet*. I sometimes feel so much of the power of God that, I believe, *if they were to cut off my feet I should heave up the stumps.*”

Billy was emphatically a *happy* Christian; he rejoiced in the Lord *always*. His friend Mr. Haslam interrogated him on one occasion as to the secret of his *constant* happiness, comparing Billy’s experience with his own. He was not always, he said, on the Mount; his prospects were sometimes clouded; his fears rather than his faith prevailed at times; he therefore wanted to know how it was that Billy got on so much better than he did. Billy answered that we must become fools for Christ’s sake; that Christians, like Mr. Haslam, who had so much *booklarnin’*, were placed at a disadvantage, when compared with some others, having so much to unlearn, “*for some of us, you know,*” Billy naively added, “*are fools to begin with.*”

On most occasions, Billy’s wit sparkled and flashed without effort apparently on his part; but he knew how to hold it in reserve when persons sought merely to gratify their curiosity, or wished him to display his powers for their amusement. Some such got more than they bargained for. Thus, to a lady who once “interviewed” him for this purpose, he was very silent and reserved. She, hoping to draw him out said, “You know we must be willing

to be fools for Christ's sake." "Must we, ma'am?" was his ready answer; "*then there is a pair of us!*"

Reproached one day by a depraved, dissolute man, as being one of those idle fellows who go about living upon others, and doing nothing whatever, he said, "My Father can keep me a gentleman always if He pleases, without my doing any work at all; but your father"—pointing to his shabby, tattered garments—"cannot even keep you in decent clothes with all your hard work." "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit; i.e., "If fools talk nonsense, do not talk nonsense with them; if fools boast a victory over wisdom, then let wisdom expose their folly."

When some person, on one occasion, asked Billy how the world was getting on now, he answered, "I don't know, for I haven't been there for twelve years."