

THE KING'S SON;
OR,
A MEMOIR OF BILLY BRAY.

CHAPTER XI.

FULLY RIPE FOR THE GARNER.

“Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.”—Job v. 26.

HAVING nearly filled the space allotted me, I notice in reading what I have written, that the subjects so run into one another, that my purpose to keep them separate and distinct has not been fully accomplished; and that I have dealt with the flowers and fruits, rather than with the roots and the principles of the Christian life.

There are also some points which in my plan had separate chapters assigned to them which have hardly been noticed; and Billy's evangelistic labours was one, in which he succeeded in first winning the *ear*, and then the *heart*, and thus introducing the gospel into many places; his view of the sin and danger of worldly conformity was another, under which head his opposition to holding *bazaars* to raise money for religious purposes, *choir* singing in the public worship of God's house, when the singers are unconverted, and to preachers and members, especially the former, allowing their *beards* to grow long, according to the prevailing fashion, might very properly have been discussed. Some will regard this last-named particular as an indication of essential narrowness of mind. But he was ready to make excuses for those persons who, he believed, allowed their beards to grow long, for the sake of their health, but he could not tolerate them for one moment if he believed that persons did so for pride, or love of show and fashion. Perhaps it was a struggle in all cases for him to overcome his prejudices against long beards! Let the reader call it a weakness in him, or what he will, it was with him a matter of conscience, and where one is to be found who is scrupulous to a fault in little matters, a hundred may be found who pay no heed to conscience whatever. In the company of many “long-bearded” men he once said, “If I thought you did it for the sake of Christ I should not care but I am afraid they are too plenty to be good.” One of them said, “They came by nature, I suppose.” “True,” said Billy, “and do you suppose that heaven ever designed everything should remain in its natural state? Do you prune your fruit trees, or allow them to grow wild, just as they please? It is only a foolish man that

would use such an argument.”

It might be thought, too, that a man who had so given himself up to the public, must have *neglected*, in some measure, his own family and friends; but he fully believed in the ancient covenant of Jehovah that he would be the God of the righteous, and to *their seed after them*;^{*} and gladly obeyed the command of the Saviour: “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and had compassion on thee.” Wife, children, brother, mother, uncle, and other relatives, believed because of his word, and had the great reward of faith in the blessing of a joyful experience, already forming quite a large group in the kingdom of eternal glory.

Billy always enforced the principle that the “best” should be given unto the Lord, and not the “blind,” the “lame,” or the “sick.” At one time at a Missionary meeting he seemed quite vexed because there was something said in the report about money received for “rags and bones.” And when he rose to address the meeting, he said, “I don’t think it is right, supporting the Lord’s cause with old rags and bones. The Lord deserves the best, and ought to have the best.† However he is very condescending, for when a person has a little ‘chick’ that is likely to die, puts it into a stocking, and lays it by the fire, saying, ‘if that “chick” lives, I will give it to the Missionaries, it is not long before it says, ‘Swee, swee,’ let me out I am better.’ I knew a woman down at St. Just some years ago who had two geese, and though she might have a good flock to begin, she could never rear above two or three. At last she promised the Lord if He would increase her flock she would give every *tenth* goose to the Missionaries. Now I reckon,” he continued, “you will say that that woman was a good heart; but I don’t think so, for if she gave every *fifth* goose to the Missionaries she would have then more than she had before. However the Lord took her at her word, and the next year she had *eleven*, and they all lived till they grew up nearly as big as old ones, and then the Lord tried her faith, one of her geese died. And what do you think the devil said? ‘*That’s the Missionary goose!*’ That’s as the devil would serve the Missionaries; he would give old, dead, stinking geese to them to eat, but what do they want of an old dead, stinking goose? But she knew ‘un,’ and she said, ‘No, devil, I have ten left now, and the Missionaries shall have one of them.’ And the next year she had eleven again. They were out swimming about the pond, with their great long necks and their beautiful white feathers, *they were the most respectable looking geese I ever saw.*”

As already stated, Billy was a most earnest and successful Missionary advocate, though some of his arguments and illustrations at times were not al-

* Gen. xvii. 7.

† Mr. Spurgeon’s comment on this is, “Well done, Billy! This is right good and sound divinity.”

together unobjectionable. I well remember on one occasion his strongly urging the people, both the converted and unconverted, to contribute, those who were converted, out of gratitude, and those who were not, because it might give them greater confidence if they should ever seek mercy and forgiveness at the Lord's hands. An old Independent minister, who had kindly lent his chapel for the meeting, sitting by my side, said to me at once, I suppose you would not like to vouch for the soundness of his theology, and before I had time to answer, Billy was in the midst of an illustration of his meaning that set us all in a roar of laughter. He knew a young man once who had been very wicked, and when convinced of his great sinfulness by the Spirit of God, he despaired for a long time of finding mercy, Billy among others tried to comfort him; but to all they said he only answered, "As I have never done anything for the Lord, *I have not, I really have not got the cheek to ask Him to bestow on me so great a blessing as the forgiveness of my sins.*" But the thought, later, that he had once given *five shillings* to help on the Lord's cause, at a time when help was much needed, greatly encouraged him. Billy said his gift "did not make the Lord a bit more willing to save him, but it made him more willing to be saved;" and therefore he believed "the devil kept the thought out of the young man's mind as long as he could."

It is more important to speak of his deep piety, his abiding sense of the Divine favour, the secret of his great usefulness, the source of his constant and perpetual joy. The "much fruit," which is so pleasing to God, cannot come except the roots have struck deep into the soil. Religion is not shallow in its nature. "The water that I shall give you," said the Saviour, "shall be in you *a well of water* springing up into everlasting life." To be "sanctified wholly," to use an apostolic phrase, Billy very early in his religious history felt to be both his duty and privilege. "I remember being," he says, 'at Hicks Mill Chapel one Sunday morning at class-meeting when a stranger led the class. The leader asked one of our members whether he could say that the Lord had cleansed him from all sin, and he could not. ' *That,*' I said in my mind, 'is sanctification; I will have that blessing by the help of the Lord and I went on my knees at once, and cried to the Lord to sanctify me wholly, body, spirit, soul. And the Lord said to me, 'Thou art clean through the word I have spoken unto thee.' And I said, 'Lord, I believe it.' When the leader came to me I told him, 'Four months ago I was a great sinner against God. Since that time I have been justified freely by His grace, and while I have been here this morning, the Lord has sanctified me wholly.'" When I had done telling what the Lord had done for me, the leader said, 'If you can believe it, it is so.' Then I said, 'I *can* believe it.' When I had told him so, what joy filled my heart I cannot find words to tell. After meeting was over, I had to go over a railroad, and all around me seemed so full of glory that it dazzled my sight. I had a joy unspeakable, and full of glory.'" From one expression

in this narrative some may dissent. It seems injudicious, to say the least, to tell a believer that he *is* sanctified if he believes he is, *or to tell a penitent that he is saved if he only believes he is*. There is a more excellent way. But *henceforth* Billy lived not to himself, but to Him who died for him and rose again. He set the Lord *always* before him. His path was like the shining light, his own favourite figure, that shineth more and more to the perfect day. *Justified, sanctified, sealed*, were successive steps in his Christian experience, more dear to him, perhaps, than to others. His faith did not become feeble, but waxed stronger and stronger; his love to his Saviour grew in intensity till it became the absorbing passion of his soul, and his hope brightened into heavenly radiance and splendour. The freshness, the gladness, the delicacy and fragrance of the richest Christian experience seemed always to be his. He soon reached, if we may borrow Bunyan's figure, the "Delectable Mountains," just in the way to the Celestial City, and which have "a pleasant prospect on every side." Happily, too, he carefully avoided traversing "the country of Conceit" which lieth near on the left hand, or sleeping in the place where "Little-Faith" lost "most of his spending money." Doubts and fears, "gloomy thoughts that rise," he knew but little about, "because he lived further up," thus escaping the thick fogs and mists which dull the hopes and becloud the prospects of ordinary Christians. He was, so one of his friends tells us, like a roe or young hart upon the mountains of Bethel; on Zion he saw the glory of God between the cherubim; on Hermon the dew of God's blessing continually rested on him; on Carmel and Sharon he gathered flowers of every hue and of richest fragrance, while on Tabor all that was earthly and sorrowful in his experience was transfigured into the heavenly.

One of the most blessed results of his deep piety was his *unfeigned humility*. His estimate of himself in comparison with other Christians was that he was a coarse spar among beautiful specimens. He would say: "Most gentlemen have a grotto"—in Billy's sense a collection of mine specimens and other curiosities so arranged as to make things beautiful in themselves still more beautiful—in the centre of which "a coarse ould (old) spar would be generally placed. So the Lord has His grotto—the Church, in which He places His own people as so many beautiful specimens of different sizes, colours, and degrees of beauty, but all so arranged as to exhibit all the graces of the Spirit, and consequently constituting a very grand and beautiful sight;" Billy being only the "coarse ould spar among the rest to show their beauties to greater advantage," but with a heart bounding with gratitude and a tongue vibrating with praise because he was counted worthy of a place among the people of God.

At public meetings the idea would sometimes come out in a somewhat different fashion. The several speakers, and their brilliant, eloquent, and pow-

erful speeches, reminded him of the precious stones with which the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem were garnished, but the greatest wonder was that God, after having hewn these out of different quarries, and made them polished stones in His glorious temple, should pick up an ould Cornish spar” to set off their great and manifold excellences with still greater effect. And then casting a look upward, a still greater wonder was it that Jehovah, from “His glorious high throne,” should stoop to fetch up *such* an “ould” spar from His footstool to increase the splendour and magnificence of His palace; and then He would anticipate the time when he, a young Prince, a son of the King of kings, should, in company with the seraphs, traverse the golden streets, and make the heavenly arches ring with his loud praises. Before he had finished, the misers, laden with gold and sinking under its weight like a hippopotamus in a bed of mud, might be told that they could not be admitted except the keenest of angels were first appointed to watch them continually, for fear they should tear up the golden pavement to hug it to their bosoms in the vain hope of filling that mighty void which God alone can fill. His practical and sound advice to them would be: “Use all your earthly possessions to make ‘lifting steps’ to reach the highest place possible in the New Jerusalem, my happy home above.”

Billy’s idea above reminds us of a beautiful passage in the *Sermons* of the Rev. John Ker, but even by the side of his graceful eloquence, Billy’s rude picture is not without its charms. Mr. Ker says: “There is a different colour of beauty in different stones that are all of them precious. One man may be burnishing to the sparkle of the diamond, while another is deepening to the glow of the ruby. For this reason there are such different temperaments in Christian character, and varying circumstances in Christian life that the foundation of the wall of the city may be garnished with all manner of precious stones. . . . It is very beautiful to see how the God, who has bound His world into a grand harmony by its very diversity, has arranged for this same end in His Church by giving the members their different faculties of work,—how the pure light that comes from the sun breaks into its separate hues when it touches the palace-house of Christ with its varied cornices and turrets, till every colour lies in tranquil beauty beside its fellow.”

His humility was his safeguard all through life. An aged person remembers hearing him say on one occasion: “Soon after I was converted the devil said to me, ‘Billy Bray, you’ll be a great man;’ *but I sunk into nothing and in that way slipped through the devil’s hands.*” Another result of Billy’s deep piety was his *continual sense of dependence upon God*. The Lord’s servants without the Lord’s presence are weak like other men, like Samson when he lost his locks. Here is one “experience” of Billy’s: “When I was in the St. Neot Circuit, I was on the plan; and I remember that one Sunday I was planned at Redgate, and there was a chapel full of people, and the Lord gave me great

power and liberty in speaking; but all at once the Lord took away His Spirit from me, so that I could not speak a word, and this might have been the best sermon that some of them ever heard. ‘What!’ you say, ‘and looking like a fool, and not able to speak?’ ‘Yes,’ for it was not long before I said, ‘I am glad I am stopped, and that for *three* reasons. And the first is, To humble my soul, and make me feel more dependent on my Lord, to think more fully of Him, and less of myself. The next reason is, To convince you that you are ungodly, for you say we can speak what we have a mind to, without the Lord as well as with Him; but you cannot say so now, for you heard how I was speaking, but when the dear Lord took away His Spirit I could not say another word; without my Lord I could do nothing. And the third reason is, That some of you young men who are standing here, may be called to stand in the pulpit some day as I am; and the Lord may take His Spirit from you as He has from me, and then you might say, ‘It is no good for me to try to preach or exhort, for I was stopped the last time I tried to preach, and I shall preach no more.’ But now you can say, ‘I saw the poor old Billy Bray stopped once like me, and he did not mind it, and told the people that he was glad his dear Lord had stopped him, and Billy Bray’s dear Lord is my Lord, and I am glad He stopped me too, for if I can benefit the people, and glorify God, *that* is what I want.’ I then spoke a great while, and told the people what the dear Lord gave me to say.”

He kept the great object of life before him wherever he went, whatever he did. Thus he writes, “I was asked to go to the re-opening of a chapel. We had large congregations. I spoke in the forenoon, and Brother Coles in the afternoon and evening. He had the mighty power of God, and preached two very good sermons. The people were very kind in giving their money for repairing God’s house. On the Monday they had a tea-meeting, and I had to speak at three o’clock. The tea was at five. I believe we should be better off if we were to *fast*, and *pray*, and give the money without a tea; we should have more of the glory in our souls. In the evening we had a speaking meeting; one of our friends took the chair. He called on the superintendent to speak first; and after that he called on me. I told the people that the dear Lord had given them a pretty chapel to worship in; and now He wanted good furniture, for bad furniture looks disgraceful in a good house. I told them that good furniture for the house of the Lord was *sanctified souls*. We must be pardoned, sanctified, and sealed, and then we shall not only be fit for the Lord’s house on earth, but we shall be *good furniture in heaven*.”

He continued to be in “labours more abundant.” His eye had a merry twinkle, his countenance an open and benevolent expression, his voice a cheerful and pleasant ring even unto the last. He took long journeys, held frequent services, had regular times for fasting and prayer—praise rather than prayer, especially at the last—and witnessed glorious victories even unto the end.

His visits to the sick seemed more numerous even than before. The infirmities of age had come upon him, but his ruling passion had undergone no change, his spiritual ardour no abatement. One of his last entries, as late as February 10th, 1868, was, "In the morning after I had breakfast, bad as I was, I thought I would go to see some friends; and after calling on some of them, I went home. But I had hard work to get home, I was so ill; and my breath was short."

Only a little time before he had been at *Newlyn* and *Crantock*, labouring among the Wesleyans. There was a revival in progress in the latter place, and in a revival Billy was always at home. "The dear Lord made the people very happy, and me happy with them." After the meeting in the chapel was closed one night, many of the people adjourned to a friend's house. There some were singing, some praising God, and others crying for mercy. Six souls were set at blessed liberty, and the meeting was continued till a very late hour. "We could do nothing but praise," Billy said, "for the Spirit was poured out in such a wonderful manner. I was as happy as I could be and live. It was one stream of glory." He was very weak in body then, but as the outward man decayed, the inward man was renewed day by day. "*I think I shall be home to Father's house soon,*" was his happy thought, his glorious hope. He returned home pale and exhausted. He left it but once afterwards, when he went to Liskeard to see his children. He got much worse, and appeared like a man in the last stage of consumption. On one occasion he sent for a medical man, and when he arrived he said: "How, doctor, I have sent for you because they tell me you are an honest man, and will tell the people the truth about their state." After the doctor had examined him, Billy said: "Well, doctor, how is it?" "*You are going to die.*" Billy instantly shouted, "Glory! glory be to God! I shall soon be in heaven." He then added in a low tone, and in his own peculiar way, "*When I get up there shall I give them your compliments, doctor, and tell them you will be coming, too?*" This the doctor says, "*made a wonderful impression upon him.*" It scarcely need be said that Billy retained all his old love for shouting; he even said if he had his time to go over again he would shout *ten* times as much. In his affliction he was visited by persons of all denominations, who liberally contributed to his support. On Friday, May 22nd, 1868, he came down stairs for the last time. To one of his old friends a few hours before his death, who asked if he had any fear of death, or of being lost, he said, "What! me fear death! me lost! Why my Saviour conquered death. If I was to go down to hell I would shout glory! glory! to my blessed Jesus until I made the bottomless pit ring again, and the miserable old Satan would say, 'Billy, Billy, this is no place for thee; get thee back.' Then up to heaven I should go, shouting glory! glory! praise the Lord!" A little later he said, "Glory!" which was his last word, and in a little time his was the unspeakable joy to behold that glory which Jesus had with the Father

before the world was. He was blessing and praising the Lord all the day, so that heaven was not to him very different to earth; the soul, according to Wesley—

“The change shall scarcely know,
Made perfect first in love.”

Glory in his experience had begun below; he enjoyed wonderful foretastes of its fullness and fruition in Heaven above. He took his departure to the skies on Monday, May 25th, 1868, having reached the age of seventy-four years within a few days.

On the Friday following, a large number of his friends and neighbours assembled at his house, when the corpse was brought out into the yard, and two appropriate addresses delivered, one by Mr. J. D. BALKWILL, Billy’s pastor, and the other by Mr. THOMAS HICKS, an old and much attached friend. His remains were interred at Baldhu Church, where they await the joyous resurrection to eternal life.

Our task is all but completed, and if possible we should, in a few closing words, like to set forth the character of Billy Bray and the lessons of his life more clearly and impressively than it has been done in the preceding pages. But we fear to make the attempt, and we rejoice to think that it can hardly be needed. The most careless reader must, we imagine, have thought while reading the foregoing account, that if Billy had not been a Christian, he had been nothing; and that the mere *form* of religion, with which many are easily satisfied, must have utterly failed to comfort and support him in his trials and temptations. Billy Bray was so greatly honoured and blessed himself, and made so great a blessing to many, because his religion was a glorious reality, part and parcel of his daily life and experience. To him all the promises of Christianity were true, all its privileges to be enjoyed, all its duties to be performed, and all its hopes and blessings to be realized. He was simple, earnest, honest, devout. He belonged to the illustrious “Peerage of Poverty.” And he, like The Wall’s-End Miner, The Village Blacksmith, The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, shall delight and instruct multitudes in days yet to come by the beautiful simplicity and goodness of his character. Many have gone as safely as he to the heaven above, who have not left behind them *a line of heavenly light, a trail of eternal glory*, as he has done, to be the guide of others, and to stimulate them to follow him as he followed Christ.