

THE KING'S SON;

OR,

A MEMOIR OF BILLY BRAY.

CHAPTER VI.

PURE RELIGION.

“Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me . . . Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.”—MATT. xxv. 34–36, 40.

IN this memorable Scripture, we are taught that the humblest disciples—the poor, the sick, the despised—are more precious unto their Divine Lord than is light to the eye, or music to the ear, or knowledge to the mind, or love to the heart. He so fully identifies Himself with His people, that an injury done to them He reckons as an injury done to Him, while a blessing bestowed upon them is a blessing bestowed upon Him. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Apostle James should declare that “*pure religion* and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” These two distinct parts of “*pure religion*” may be said to be equal in importance, but it is to the first part—visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction—that we now ask the attention of the reader.

In this particular, Billy Bray may be almost said to have had a chivalrous sense of duty and honour. Often dependent himself on the charity of others—for which he was truly grateful, but not servile or obsequious—he gladly shared with persons poorer than himself what little he possessed. He could not keep two hats, one of his friends says, two days, if he knew of a brother in Christ in want of one. None enjoyed song and prayer and meditation and worship more than he; but he never once forgot, in the fulness of his joy, that the naked had to be clothed, and the hungry to be fed. He did not offer unto the Lord his God that which cost him nothing. He not only poured out all his heart in devotion to his Saviour, but of his “*substance*” he willingly took for the Lord’s work. We sometimes get prayer instead of la-

bour, or labour instead of prayer; beneficence instead of devotion, or devotion instead of beneficence. Billy Bray had not so learned Christ. His religion was not one-sided, but fully developed in every direction. It was bright in its God-ward aspects, but it also beamed on men with tenderness, and offered them its gifts of love and service. When he had exhausted his own little store in ministering unto the wants of the poor, he sought for them help from others. In one instance of this kind, a gentleman, to whom he applied, gave him a sovereign for some poor persons, and his lady also gave him some clothes for them. After he had had tea, he said he must pray before he left the house, for he felt it as much his duty to pray in a rich man's house as in a poor man's. The gentleman and lady, with some of their servants, knelt together at His footstool who is "King of kings; and Lord of lords," while Billy poured out all his heart, for he had sweet access to the throne of grace. Some Quaker friends, whose kindness to Billy all through life was very marked, were also appealed to, and with the three pounds he collected he bought food and clothing for the family of a "quiet, thrifty, holiest man,"—and what was a great recommendation to Billy, one who neither drank nor smoked,—paid their quarter's rent, filled the cottage with sunshine and gladness, and received himself the blessing of those that were ready to perish.

Visits to such devoted Christians as *Peggy Mitchell*, the best scholar in Gwennap parish, because she could read her "title clear to mansions in the skies," were their own exceeding great reward, and it was passing strange to Billy that the duty of visiting the sick should be so much neglected. But the unconverted he sought out as well, and his message of mercy in many a sick chamber God signally blessed. Sometimes young persons of good position accompanied him to the house of mourning, who were both greatly blessed, and made a blessing. These, notwithstanding earthly distinctions and differences, were his brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, and therefore greatly beloved for His sake. As he had great tact and discretion, besides unflinching cheerfulness, his visits were by many eagerly sought and highly prized. To one who had been a great sufferer for many years, he said, "The pain of yesterday and last night you will never feel any more. You are as well off as the queen so far as *yesterday* is concerned. With the queen yesterday is gone, and so is it with you;" or as another sufferer said to him, she could praise God, "for every pain is a pain the less." Another person whom he visited the same day, an aged Christian eighty years old—he tells us knew quite as much about the dear Lord as he could tell her. She loved the Lord so much that she did not know a name *good enough* by which to call Him. "Every word she spoke was sweet to my soul," Billy said. And why? he inquires. Because she was filled, as were Barnabas and Stephen, with the Holy Ghost. "*And Satan can do nothing by 'they' who are filled with the Holy Ghost.*"

Another dear Christian, of five and forty years standing, seen, too, the same day, was one after his own heart, because the Lord had converted her “*in and out*” in allusion to the excessive “outward adorning” of some, which Billy strongly condemned.

(Sometimes in his public addresses, in allusion to the artificial flowers with which so many “women professing godliness” adorn themselves, he would say, “I wouldn’t mind your having a wagon-load of them on your heads, if that would do you any good; but you know it wouldn’t, and all persons know *that flowers only grow in soft places.*” And many persons can testify that men who made themselves ridiculous by their conceited airs and fine dress did not escape his well-merited and striking rebukes. The nicely-feathered arrow from his well-strung bow has often gone much below the surface. His spirit was always stirred within him when he saw men who spent more time in “oiling their cobs,” or “twirling their whiskers,” than in prayer or the reading of the Bible. Pity that so many should be found to labour in trying to “destroy the fence that separates the Church from the world,” and to make bystanders believe that they are more concerned to exhibit the graces of their persons than they are to display the beauties of holiness, or the glories of their Divine Redeemer).

About the same time he found out another person, *whose class-leader had not been to see her but once for a whole year*, and he marvelled not that many became therefore indifferent to heavenly things. He was not sanguine about every case. He saw a person who had been very wicked, and was told that he had been seeking the Lord a long time. He hoped he had; but he added, “It is dangerous to put off our soul’s salvation until we are on our death-bed; *for where there is one who gets the prize, there are ten who lose it, and the same old devil that got at them down-stairs will get at them when they are in their beds.*” An old woman who, with a crippled daughter lived in one little dirty down-stairs room, had a word of encouragement. She had had many trials, but she was very hopeful and trusting. The storm had stripped her little cot of its roof, but the Lord had in mercy spared both her and her daughter. Billy said to her, “Heaven will be a pretty place for you when you get there. You will be able to say, ‘What a glorious place I am in now! I am not now down in the house with the roof blown away; I am not down now in a dirty little room, with little meat and clothes;—oh what a mighty change is this! What a glorious place is heaven!’” and he adds, “I believe if any will know the joy of heaven in its higher state, it will be those who have suffered most down here.”

I went with Billy one day to visit a preacher, who while he was conversing and praying with him became remarkably happy. Presently the sick man expressed a hope that the Lord would take him to heaven, there and then, as he felt quite ready for the change, and he should not then grieve his best

Friend again by carelessness or unbelief. His wife, who was standing by the side of the bed, turned away, her eyes filled with tears. To her Billy immediately turned and said, "So you would not like to have your husband promoted, then?" And then he took up his parable. "Don't you think that your eye ought to be as much upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the eye of a worldly woman is upon the Queen? Now if the Queen were to send for the brother, or son, or husband of any such woman, would not she say, 'I am sorry to part with him, but it may be the making of him, I must let him go. *It is the Queen who has sent for him.*' And yet you knew," he continued, "that it might be a great expense to prepare him to go; or the Queen might soon die, or he offend her, and then he would be as bad off as ever. But the Lord Jesus Christ is at all the expense of the '*fit out,*' He provides the robe in which your husband will be clothed, the crown that he will wear, the palm that he will wave; the Lord Jesus Christ will never die, and your husband wants to go because he knows he shall never offend him again; *now ought you not to be willing?*" The distressed wife, who was now smiling through her tears, said she was willing, but she did not want to lose him just yet. "And do you think," said Billy, "that you will ever be willing. If my Joey' lives, and if I am to wait until she is willing for me to go to heaven, I shall never get there. The fact is, the Lord has a right to take your husband, or me, or any of His children whenever He pleases, *and if I were the Lord I would too, and not ask anybody.*"

I well remember having a visit from Billy when, to all appearances, I was on the borders of the grave, and too weak to join in conversation, or to hear other persons talk much. But Billy intermingled, in a very striking manner, prayer and conversation, addressing earnest exhortations to me, with passionate entreaties to Jehovah. He hoped, he believed, he felt sure that the Lord would raise me up; then I was exhorted to be faithful, to make full proof of my ministry, to bear a good testimony for Christ always; and then he burst out into a glowing description of the honours and dignities which in that case should be my reward,—I was to have a robe, a palm, a throne, a kingdom, a crown, a crown of glory, a crown of life, a crown of righteousness,—and he interposed the remark—I hardly knew whether it was intended for God or myself, but it nearly convulsed me with laughter,—“And wage it will be a fine and pretty one.”

There is no doubt about the brightness of Billy's crown, or the fullness of his reward, for in various ways he turned “many to righteousness,” and lie shall therefore shine forth “like the sun in the kingdom of our Father,” or as the “stars for ever and ever.”

How just and beautiful are the following remarks respecting Billy's piety, with which we may fitly close this chapter: “Religion to him was not a duty to be done—not a privilege to be enjoyed in leisure hours—not a benefit-

club, a comfortable provision for ‘rainy days;’—it was a *life*. Never left behind, never put off with the Sunday clothes, never hidden before great or low, good or bad—but *in* him, flowing through him, speaking in every word, felt in every action, seen in every look—deep, true, abiding religion was with him altogether *a life*. Dead indeed unto sin, he was now living unto God through Jesus Christ.

“Billy had ‘lighted his candle,’ and resolved that it should give light to all that were in the house. His religion was not a *safety-lamp*, laid by till he should be going down into the dark valley—nor like the chapel gaslight, that burned only on Sundays and at the week-evening services. Once lighted, it was put into perhaps a commonplace sort of a candle-stick, but all at home could see by it. And as the world about him was ‘a dark world,’ he thrust his candle into a lantern and took it forth wherever he went, and guided not a few from ‘horrible pits’ that threatened them into the way of salvation. One thing about this lighted candle Billy never forgot—‘*that it burned none the worse for every candle that was lighted from it.*’