

A RETROSPECT

BY

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“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord
thy God led thee....” Deut. viii. 2.

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CHAPTER V

LIFE IN LONDON

I MUST not now attempt to detail the ways in which the LORD was pleased—often to my surprise, as well as to my delight—to help me from time to time. I soon found that it was not possible to live quite as economically in London as in Hull. To lessen expenses I shared a room with a cousin, four miles from the hospital, providing myself with board; and after various experiments I found that the most economical way was to live almost exclusively on brown bread and water. Thus I was able to make the means that GOD gave me last as long as possible. Some of my expenses I could not diminish, but my board was largely within my own control. A large twopenny loaf of brown bread, purchased daily on my long walk from the hospital, furnished me with supper and breakfast; and on that diet, with a few apples for lunch, I managed to walk eight or nine miles a day, besides being a good deal on foot while attending the practice of the hospital and the medical school.

One incident that occurred just about this time I must refer to. The husband of my former landlady in Hull was chief officer of a ship that sailed from London, and by receiving his half-pay monthly and remitting it to her I was able to save her the cost of a commission. This had been doing for several months, when she wrote requesting that I would obtain the next payment as early as possible, as her rent was almost due, and she depended upon that sum to meet it. The request came at an inconvenient time. I was working hard for an examination in the hope of obtaining a scholarship which would be of service to me, and felt that I could ill afford the time to go during the busiest part of the day to the city and procure the money. I had, however, sufficient of my own in hand to enable me to send the required sum. I made the remittance therefore, purposing, as soon as the examination was over, to go and draw the regular allowance with which to refund myself.

Before the time of examination the medical school was closed for a day, on account of the funeral of the Duke of Wellington, and I had an opportunity of going at once to the office, which was situated in a street off Cheapside, and applying for the due amount. To my surprise and dismay the clerk told me that he could not pay it, as the officer in question had run away from his ship and gone to the gold diggings. “Well,” I remarked, “that is very inconvenient for me, as I have already advanced the money, and I know his wife will have no means of repaying it” The clerk said he was sorry, but could of course only act according to orders; so there was no help for me in

that direction. A little more time and thought, however, brought the comforting conclusion to my mind, that as I was depending on the LORD for everything, and His means were not limited, it was a small matter to be brought a little sooner or later into the position of needing fresh supplies from Him; and so the joy and the peace were not long interfered with.

Very soon after this, possibly the same evening, while sewing together some sheets of paper on which to take notes of the lectures, I accidentally pricked the first finger of my right hand, and in a few moments forgot all about it. The next day at the hospital I continued dissecting as before. The body was that of a person who had died of fever, and was more than usually disagreeable and dangerous. I need scarcely say that those of us who were at work upon it dissected with special care, knowing that the slightest scratch might cost us our lives. Before the morning was far advanced I began to feel very weary, and while going through the surgical wards at noon was obliged to run out, being suddenly very sick—a most unusual circumstance with me, as I took but little food and nothing that could disagree with me. After feeling faint for some time, a draught of cold water revived me, and I was able to rejoin the students. I became more and more unwell, however, and ere the afternoon lecture on surgery was over found it impossible to hold the pencil and continue taking notes. By the time the next lecture was through, my whole arm and right side were full of severe pain, and I was both looking and feeling very ill.

Finding that I could not resume work, I went into the dissecting-room to bind up the portion I was engaged upon and put away my apparatus, and said to the demonstrator, who was a very skilful surgeon, “I cannot think what has come over me,” describing the symptoms. “Why,” said he, “what has happened is clear enough: you must have cut yourself in dissecting, and you know that this is a case of malignant fever.” I assured him that I had been most careful, and was quite certain that I had no cut or scratch. “Well,” he replied, “you certainly must have had one;” and he very closely scrutinised my hand to find it, but in vain. All at once it occurred to me that I had pricked my finger the night before, and I asked him if it were possible that a prick from a needle, at that time, could have been still unclosed. His opinion was that this was probably the cause of the trouble, and he advised me to get a hansom, drive home as fast as I could, and arrange my affairs forthwith. “For,” he said, “you are a dead man.”

My first thought was one of sorrow that I could not go to China; but very soon came the feeling, “Unless I am greatly mistaken, I have work to do in China, and shall not die.” I was glad, however, to take the opportunity of speaking to my medical friend, who was a confirmed sceptic as to things spiritual, of the joy that the prospect of perhaps soon being with my MASTER

gave me; telling him at the same time that I did not think I should die, as, unless I were much mistaken, I had work to do in China; and if so, however severe the struggle, I must be brought through. "That is all very well," he answered, "but you get a hansom and drive home as fast as you can. You have no time to lose, for you will soon be incapable of winding up your affairs."

I smiled a little at the idea of my driving home in a hansom, for by this time my means were too exhausted to allow of such a proceeding, and I set out to walk the distance if possible. Before long, however, my strength gave way, and I felt it was no use to attempt to reach home by walking. Availing myself of an omnibus from Whitechapel Church to Farringdon Street, and another from Farringdon Street onwards, I reached, in great suffering, the neighbourhood of Soho Square, behind which I lived. On going into the house I got some hot water from the servant, and charging her very earnestly—literally as a dying man—to accept eternal life as the gift of God through JESUS CHRIST, I bathed my head and lanced the finger, hoping to let out some of the poisoned blood. The pain was very severe; I fainted away, and was for some time unconscious, so long that when I came to myself I found that I had been carried to bed.

An uncle of mine who lived near at hand had come in, and sent for his own medical man, an assistant surgeon at the Westminster Hospital. I assured my uncle that medical help would be of no service to me, and that I did not wish to go to the expense involved. He, however, quieted me on this score, saying that he had sent for his own doctor, and that the bill would be charged to himself. When the surgeon came and learned all the particulars, he said, "Well, if you have been living moderately, you may pull through; but if you have been going in for beer and that sort of thing, there is no manner of chance for you." I thought that if sober living was to do anything, few could have a better chance, as little but bread and water had been my diet for a good while past. I told him I had lived abstemiously, and found that it helped me in study. "But now," he said, "you must keep up your strength, for it will be a pretty hard struggle." And he ordered me a bottle of port wine every day, and as many chops as I could consume. Again I smiled inwardly, having no means for the purchase of such luxuries. This difficulty, however, was also met by my kind uncle, who sent me at once all that was needed.

I was much concerned, notwithstanding the agony I suffered, that my dear parents should not be made acquainted with my state. Thought and prayer had satisfied me that I was not going to die, but that there was indeed a work for me to do in China. If my dear parents should come up and find me in that condition, I must lose the opportunity of seeing how God was go-

ing to work for me, now that my money had almost come to an end. So, after prayer for guidance, I obtained a promise from my uncle and cousin not to write to my parents, but to leave me to communicate with them myself. I felt it was a very distinct answer to prayer when they gave me this promise, and I took care to defer all communication with them myself until the crisis was past and the worst of the attack over. At home they knew that I was working hard for an examination, and did not wonder at my silence.

Days and nights of suffering passed slowly by; but at length, after several weeks, I was sufficiently restored to leave my room; and then I learned that two men, though not from the London Hospital, who had had dissection wounds at the same time as myself, had both succumbed, while I was spared in answer to prayer to work for God in China.