

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 VII

MIGHTY TO SAVE

RETURNING to London when sufficiently recovered to resume my studies, the busy life of hospital and lecture-hall was resumed; often relieved by happy Sundays of fellowship with Christian friends, especially in London or Tottenham. Opportunities for service are to be found in every sphere, and mine was no exception. I shall only mention one case now that gave me great encouragement in seeking conversion even when it seemed apparently hopeless.

GOD had given me the joy of winning souls before, but not in surroundings of such special difficulty. With GOD all things are possible, and no conversion ever takes place save by the almighty power of the HOLY GHOST. The great need, therefore, of every Christian worker is to know GOD. Indeed, this is the purpose for which He has given us eternal life, as our SAVIOUR Himself says, in the oft misquoted verse, John xvii. 3: "This is [the object of] life eternal, [not to know but] that they might know Thee the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom Thou hast sent." I was now to prove the willingness of GOD to answer prayer for spiritual blessing under most unpromising circumstances, and thus to gain an increased acquaintance with the prayer-answering GOD as One "mighty to save."

A short time before leaving for China, it became my duty daily to dress the foot of a patient suffering from senile gangrene. The disease commenced, as usual, insidiously, and the patient had little idea that he was a doomed man, and probably had not long to live. I was not the first to attend to him, but when the case was transferred to me, I naturally became very anxious about his soul. The family with whom he lived were Christians, and from them I learned that he was an avowed atheist, and very antagonistic to anything religious. They had, without asking his consent, invited a Scripture reader to visit him, but in great passion he had ordered him from the room. The vicar of the district had also called, hoping to help him; but he had spit in his face, and refused to allow him to speak to him. His passionate temper was described to me as very violent, and altogether the case seemed to be as hopeless as could well be imagined.

Upon first commencing to attend him I prayed much about it; but for two or three days said nothing to him of a religious nature. By special care in dressing his diseased limb I was able considerably to lessen his sufferings, and he soon began to manifest grateful appreciation of my services. One day, with a trembling heart, I took advantage of his warm acknowledgments to tell him what was the spring of my action, and to speak of his own sol-

em position and need of GOD's mercy through CHRIST. It was evidently only by a powerful effort of self-restraint that he kept his lips closed. He turned over in bed with his back to me, and uttered no word.

I could not get the poor man out of my mind, and very often through each day I pleaded with GOD, by His SPIRIT, to save him ere He took him hence. After dressing the wound and relieving his pain, I never failed to say a few words to him, which I hoped the LORD would bless.

He always turned his back to me, looking annoyed, but never spoke a word in reply. After continuing this for some time, my heart sank. It seemed to me that I was not only doing no good, but perhaps really hardening him and increasing his guilt. One day, after dressing his limb and washing my hands, instead of returning to the bedside to speak to him, I went to the door, and stood hesitating for a few moments with the thought in my mind, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." I looked at the man and saw his surprise, as it was the first time since speaking to him that I had attempted to leave without going up to his bedside to say a few words for my MASTER. I could bear it no longer. Bursting into tears, I crossed the room and said, "My friend, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, I must deliver my soul," and went on to speak very earnestly to him, telling him with many tears how much I wished that he would let me pray with him. To my unspeakable joy he did not turn away, but replied, "If it will be a relief to you, do." I need scarcely say that I fell on my knees and poured out my whole soul to GOD on his behalf. I believe the LORD then and there wrought a change in his soul.

He was never afterwards unwilling to be spoken to and prayed with, and within a few days he definitely accepted CHRIST as his SAVIOUR. Oh the joy it was to me to see that dear man rejoicing in hope of the glory of God! He told me that for forty years he had never darkened the door of church or chapel, and that then-forty years ago—he had only entered a place of worship to be married, and could not be persuaded to go inside when his wife was buried. Now, thank God, his sin-stained soul, I had every reason to believe, was washed, was sanctified, was justified, in the Name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST and in the SPIRIT of our God. Oftentimes, when in my early work in circumstances rendered me almost hopeless of success, I have thought of this man's conversion, and have been encouraged to persevere in speaking the Word, whether men would hear or whether they would forbear.

The now happy sufferer lived for some time after this change, and was never tired of bearing testimony to the grace of God. Though his condition was most distressing, the alteration in his character and behaviour made the previously painful duty of attending him one of real pleasure. I have often thought since, in connection with this case and the work of God generally,

of the words, "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Perhaps if there were more of that intense distress for souls that leads to tears, we should more frequently see the results we desire. Sometimes it may be that while we are complaining of the hardness of the hearts of those we are seeking to benefit, the hardness of our own hearts, and our own feeble apprehension of the solemn reality of eternal things, may be the true cause of our want of success.