

## FATHER FISHER.

**H**E came to California in 1855. The Pacific Conference was in session at Sacramento. It was announced that the new preacher from Texas would preach at night. The boat was detained in some way, and he just had time to reach the church, where a large and expectant congregation were in waiting. Below medium height, plainly dressed, and with a sort of peculiar shuffling movement as he went down the aisle, he attracted no special notice except for the profoundly reverential manner that never left him anywhere. But the moment he faced his audience and spoke, it was evident to them that a man of mark stood before them. They were magnetized at once, and every eye was fixed upon the strong yet benignant face, the capacious blue eyes, the ample forehead, and massive head, bald on top, with silver locks on either side. His tones in reading the scripture and the hymns were remarkably solemn and very musical. The blazing fervor of the prayer that followed was absolutely startling to some of the preachers, who had cooled down under the depressing influence of the moral atmosphere of the country. It almost seemed as if we could hear the rush of the pentecostal wind and see the tongues of flame. The very house seemed to be rocking on its foundations. By the time the prayer had ended, all were in a glow, and ready for the sermon. The text I do not now call to mind, but the impression made by

the sermon remains. I had seen and heard preachers who glowed in the pulpit; this man blazed. His words poured forth in a molten flood, his face shone like a furnace heated from within, his large blue eyes flashed with the lightning of impassioned sentiment, and anon swam in pathetic appeal that no heart could resist. Body, brain, and spirit—all seemed to feel the mighty afflatus. His very frame seemed to expand, and the little man who had gone into the pulpit with shuffling step and down-cast eyes was transfigured before us. When, with radiant face, upturned eyes, an upward sweep of his arm, and trumpet voice, he shouted, "Hallelujah to God!" the tide of emotion broke over all barriers, the people rose to their feet, and the church reëchoed with their responsive hallelujahs. The new preacher from Texas that night gave some Californians a new idea of evangelical eloquence, and took his place as a burning and a shining light among the ministers of God on the Pacific coast.

"He is the man we want for San Francisco!" exclaimed the impulsive B. T. Crouch, who had kindled into a generous enthusiasm under that marvelous discourse.

He was sent to San Francisco. He was one of a company of preachers who have successively had charge of the Southern Methodist Church in that wondrous city inside the Golden Gate—Boring, Evans, Fisher, Fitzgerald, Gober, Brown, Bailey, Wood, Miller, Ball, Hoss, Chamberlin, Mahon, Tuggle, Simmons, Henderson. There was an almost unlimited diversity of temperament, culture, and gifts among these men; but they all had a similar experience in this, that San Francisco gave them new revelations of human nature and of themselves. Some went away crippled and

scarred, some sad, some broken; but perhaps in the Great Day it may be found that for each and all there was a hidden blessing in the heart throes of a service that seemed to demand that they should sow in bitter tears, and know no joyful reaping this side of the grave. O my brothers, who have felt the fires of this furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, shall we not in the resting place beyond the river realize that these fires burned out of us the dross that we did not know was in our souls? The bird that comes out of the tempest with broken wing may henceforth take a lowlier flight, but will be safer because it ventures no more into the region of storms.

Fisher did not succeed in San Francisco, because he could not get a hearing. A little handful would meet him on Sunday mornings in one of the upper rooms of the old City Hall, and listen to sermons that sent them away in a religious glow, but he had no leverage for getting at the masses. He was no adept in the methods by which the modern sensational preacher compels the attention of the novelty-loving crowds in our cities. An evangelist in every fiber of his being, he chafed under the limitations of his charge in San Francisco; and from time to time he would make a dash into the country, where, at camp meetings and other special occasions, he preached the gospel with a power that broke many a sinner's heart, and with a persuasiveness that brought many a wanderer back to the Good Shepherd's fold. His bodily energy, like his religious zeal, was unflagging. It seemed little less than a miracle that he could, day after day, make such vast expenditure of nervous energy without exhaustion. He put all his strength into every sermon and exhortation, whether addressed to admiring and weeping thou-

sands at a great camp meeting, or to a dozen or less "stand-bys" at the Saturday morning service of a quarterly meeting.

He had his trials and crosses. Those who knew him intimately learned to expect his mightiest pulpit efforts when the shadow on his face and the unconscious sigh showed that he was passing through the waters and crying to God out of the depths. In such experiences, the strong man is revealed and gathers new strength; the weak one goes under. But his strength was more than mere natural force of will; it was the strength of a mighty faith in God—that unseen force by which the saints work righteousness, subdue kingdoms, escape the violence of fire, and stop the mouths of lions.

As a flame of fire, Fisher itinerated all over California and Oregon, kindling a blaze of revival in almost every place he touched. He was mighty in the Scriptures, and seemed to know the Book by heart. His was no rose water theology. He believed in a hell, and pictured it in Bible language with a vividness and awfulness that thrilled the stoutest sinner's heart; he believed in heaven, and spoke of it in such a way that it seemed that with him faith had already changed to sight. The gates of pearl, the crystal river, the shining ranks of the white-robed throngs, their songs swelling as the sound of many waters, the holy love and rapture of the glorified hosts of the redeemed, were made to pass in panoramic procession before the listening multitudes, until the heaven he pictured seemed to be a present reality. He lived in the atmosphere of the supernatural; the spirit world was to him most real.

"I have been out of the body," he said to me one day. The words were spoken softly, and his

countenance, always grave in its aspect, deepened in its solemnity of expression as he spoke.

"How was that?" I inquired.

"It was in Texas. I was returning from a quarterly meeting where I had preached one Sunday morning with great liberty and with unusual effect. The horses attached to my vehicle became frightened, and ran away. They were wholly beyond control, plunging down the road at a fearful speed, when, by a slight turn to one side, the wheel struck a large log. There was a concussion, and then a blank. The next thing I knew I was floating in the air above the road. I saw everything as plainly as I see your face at this moment. There lay my body in the road; there lay the log; and there were the trees, the fence, the fields, and everything, perfectly natural. My motion, which had been upward, was arrested, and as, poised in the air, I looked at my body lying there in the road so still, I felt a strong desire to go back to it, and found myself sinking toward it. The next thing I knew I was lying in the road where I had been thrown out, with a number of friends about me, some holding up my head, others chafing my hands, or looking on with pity or alarm. Yes, I was out of the body for a little, and I know there is a spirit world."

His voice had sunk into a sort of whisper, and the tears were in his eyes. I was strangely thrilled. Both of us were silent for a time, as if we heard the echoes of voices and saw the beckonings of shadowy hands from that other world which sometimes seems so far away, and yet is so near to each one of us.

Surely yon heaven, where angels see God's face,  
Is not so distant as we deem  
From this low earth. 'Tis but a little space,  
'Tis but a veil the winds might blow aside;

Yes, this all that us of earth divide  
From the bright dwellings of the glorified,  
The land of which I dream.

But it was no dream to this man of mighty faith, the windows of whose soul opened at all times Godward. To him immortality was a demonstrated fact, an experience. He had been out of the body.

Intensity was his dominating quality. He wrote verses, and whatever they may have lacked of the subtle element that marks poetical genius, they were full of his ardent personality and devotional abandon. He compounded medicines whose virtues, backed by his own unwavering faith, wrought wondrous cures. On several occasions he accepted challenge to polemic battle, and his opponents found in him a fearless warrior, whose onset was next to irresistible. In these discussions it was no uncommon thing for his arguments to close with such bursts of spiritual power that the doctrinal duel would end in a great religious excitement, bearing disputants and hearers away on mighty tides of feeling that none could resist.

I saw in the *Texas Christian Advocate* an incident, related by Dr. F. A. Mood, that gives a good idea of what Fisher's eloquence was when in full tide:

"About ten years ago," says Dr. M., "when the train from Houston, on the Central railroad, on one occasion reached Hempstead, it was peremptorily brought to a halt. There was a strike among the employees of the road, on what was significantly called by the strikers the 'Death Warrant.' The road, it seems, had required all of its employees to sign a paper renouncing all claims to moneyed reparation in case of their bodily injury while in its service. 'The excitement incident to a strike was at its height at Hempstead when our train reached there. The tracks were

blocked with trains that had been stopped as they arrived from the different branches of the road, and the employees were gathered about in groups, discussing the situation—the passengers peering around with hopeless curiosity. When our train stopped, the conductor told us that we would have to lie over all night, and many of the passengers left to find accommodations in the hotels of the town. It was now night, when a man came into the car and exclaimed: ‘The strikers are tarring and feathering a poor wretch out here, who has taken sides with the road; come out and see it.’ Nearly every one in the car hastened out. I had risen, when a gentleman behind me gently pulled my coat, and said to me: ‘Sit down a moment.’ He went on to say: ‘I judge, sir, that you are a clergyman; and I advise you to remain here. You may be put to much inconvenience by having to appear as a witness; in a mob of that sort, too, there is no telling what may follow.’ I thanked him and resumed my seat. He then asked me to what denomination I belonged, and upon my telling him that I was a Methodist preacher, he asked eagerly and promptly if I had ever met a Methodist preacher in Texas by the name of Fisher, describing accurately the appearance of our glorified brother. Finding that I knew him well, he proceeded to give the following incident. I give it as nearly as I can in his own words. Said he:

“‘I am a Californian; have practiced law for years in that State, and, at the time I allude to, was district judge. I was holding court at— [I cannot now recall the name of the town he mentioned], and on Saturday was told that a Methodist camp meeting was being held a few miles from town. I determined to visit it, and reached the place of meeting in good time to hear the great

preacher of the occasion, Father Fisher. The meeting was held in a river canyon. The rocks towered hundreds of feet on either side, rising over like an arch. Through the ample space over which the rocks hung the river flowed, furnishing abundance of cool water, while a pleasant breeze fanned a shaded spot. A great multitude had assembled—hundreds of very hard cases, who had gathered there, like myself, for the mere novelty of the thing. I am not a religious man—never have been thrown under religious influences. I respect religion, and respect its teachers, but have been very little in contact with religious things. At the appointed time, the preacher rose. He was small, with white hair combed back from his forehead, and he wore a venerable beard. I do not know much about the Bible, and I cannot quote from his text, but he preached on the judgment. I tell you, sir, I have heard eloquence at the bar and on the hustings, but I never heard such eloquence as that old preacher gave us that day. At the last, when he described the multitudes calling on the rocks and mountains to fall on them, I instinctively looked up to the arching rocks above me. Will you believe it, sir?—as I looked up, to my horror I saw the walls of the canyon swaying as if they were coming together! Just then the preacher called on all that needed mercy to kneel down. I recollect he said something like this: “‘Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess;’ and you might as well do it now as then.” The whole multitude fell on their knees—every one of them. Although I had never done so before, I confess to you, sir, that I got down on my knees. I did not want to be buried right then and there by those rocks that seemed to be swaying to destroy me. The old man prayed for us; it was

a wonderful prayer! I want to see him once more; where will I be likely to find him?’

“When he had closed his narrative, I said to him: ‘Judge, I hope you have bowed frequently since that day.’ ‘Alas! no, sir,’ he replied, ‘not much; but depend upon it, Father Fisher is a wonderful orator—he made me think that day that the walls of the canyon were falling.’”

He went back to Texas, the scene of his early labors and triumphs, to die. His evening sky was not cloudless—he suffered much—but his sunset was calm and bright; his waking in the Morning Land was glorious. If it was at that short period of silence spoken of in the Apocalypse, we may be sure it was broken when Fisher went in.

## THE CALIFORNIA MADHOUSE.

ON my first visit to the State Insane Asylum, at Stockton, I was struck by the beauty of a boy of some seven or eight years, who was moving about the grounds clad in a strait-jacket. In reply to my inquiries, the resident physician told me his history:

“About a year ago he was on his way to California with the family to which he belonged. He was a general pet among the passengers on the steamer. Handsome, confiding, and overflowing with boyish spirits, everybody had a smile and a kind word for the winning little fellow. Even the rough sailors would pause a moment to pat his curly head as they passed. One day a sailor, yielding to a playful impulse in passing, caught up the boy in his arms, crying: ‘I am going to throw you into the sea!’

“The child gave one scream of terror, and went into convulsions. When the paroxysm subsided, he opened his eyes and gazed around with a vacant expression. His mother, who bent over him with a pale face, noticed the look, and almost screamed: ‘Tommy, here is your mother! Don’t you know me?’

“The child gave no sign of recognition. He never knew his poor mother again. He was literally frightened out of his senses. The mother’s anguish was terrible. The remorse of the sailor

for his thoughtless freak was so great that it in some degree disarmed the indignation of the passengers and crew. The child had learned to read, and had made rapid progress in the studies suited to his age, but all was swept away by the cruel blow. He was unable to utter a word intelligently. Since he has been here there have been signs of returning mental consciousness, and we have begun with him as with an infant. He knows and can call his own name, and is now learning the alphabet."

"How is his health?"

"His health is pretty good, except that he has occasional convulsive attacks that can only be controlled by the use of powerful opiates."

I was glad to learn, on a visit made two years later, that the unfortunate boy had died.

This child was murdered by a fool. The fools are always murdering children, though the work is not always done as effectually as in this case. They cripple and half kill them by terror. There are many who will read this sketch who will carry to the grave and into the world of spirits natures out of which half the sweetness and brightness and beauty has been crushed by ignorance or brutality. In most cases it is ignorance. The hand that should guide, smites; the voice that should soothe, jars the sensitive chords that are untuned forever. He who thoughtlessly excites terror in a child's heart is unconsciously doing the devil's work; he that does it consciously is a devil.

"There is a lady here whom I wish you would talk to. She belongs to one of the most respectable families in San Francisco, is cultivated, refined, and has been the center of a large and loving circle. Her monomania is spiritual despair. She thinks she has committed the unpardonable sin.

There she is now. I will introduce you to her. Talk with her, and comfort her if you can."

She was a tall, well-formed woman in black, with all the marks of refinement in her dress and bearing. She was walking the floor to and fro with rapid steps, wringing her hands and moaning piteously. Indescribable anguish was in her face—it was a *hopeless* face. It haunted my thoughts for many days, and it is vividly before me as I write now. The kind physician introduced me, and left the apartment.

There is a sacredness about such an interview that inclines me to veil its details.

"I am willing to talk with you, sir, and appreciate your motive, but I understand my situation. I have committed the unpardonable sin, and I know there is no hope for me."

With the earnestness excited by intense sympathy, I combated her conclusion, and felt certain that I could make her see and feel that she had given way to an illusion.

She listened respectfully to all I had to say, and then said again: "I know my situation. I denied my Saviour after all his goodness to me, and he has left me forever."

There was the frozen calmness of utter despair in look and tone. I left her as I found her.

"I will introduce you to another woman, the opposite of the poor lady you have just seen. She thinks she is a queen, and is perfectly harmless. You must be careful to humor her illusion. There she is; let me present you."

She was a woman of immense size, enormously fat, with broad, red face, and a self-satisfied smirk, dressed in some sort of flaming scarlet stuff, profusely tinselled all over, making a gorgeously ridiculous effect. She received me with a mixture of

mock dignity and smiling condescension, and, surveying herself admiringly, she asked: "How do you like my dress?"

It was not the first time that royalty had shown itself not above the little weaknesses of human nature. On being told that her apparel was indeed magnificent, she was much pleased, and drew herself up proudly, and was a picture of ecstatic vanity. Are the real queens as happy? When they lay aside their royal robes for their graveclothes, will not the pageantry which was the glory of their lives seem as vain as that of this tinsel queen of the madhouse? Where is happiness, after all? Is it in the circumstances, the external conditions? or is it in the mind? Such were the thoughts passing through my mind, when a man approached me with a violin. Every eye brightened, and the queen seemed to thrill with pleasure in every nerve.

"This is the only way we can get some of them to take any exercise. The music rouses them, and they will dance as long as they are permitted to do so."

The fiddler struck up a lively tune, and the queen, with marvelous lightness of step and ogling glances, ambled up to a tall, raw-boned Methodist preacher, who had come with me, and invited him to dance with her. The poor parson seemed sadly embarrassed, as her manner was very pressing; but he awkwardly and confusedly declined, amid the titters of all present. It was a singular spectacle, that dance of the madwomen. The most striking figure on the floor was the queen. Her great size, her brilliant apparel, her astonishing agility, the perfect time she kept, the bows, the smiles, and blandishments she bestowed on an imaginary partner were indescribably ludicrous. Now and then

in her evolutions she would cast a momentary reproachful glance at the ungallant clergyman who had refused to dance with feminine royalty, and who stood looking on with a sheepish expression of face. He was a Kentuckian, and lack of gallantry is not a Kentucky trait.

During the session of the Annual Conference at Stockton, in 1859 or 1860, the resident physician invited me to preach to the inmates of the Asylum on Sunday afternoon. The novelty of the service, which was announced in the daily papers, attracted a large number of visitors, among them the greater part of the preachers. The day was one of those bright, clear, beautiful October days, peculiar to California, that make you think of heaven. I stood on the steps, and the hundreds of men and women stood below me with their upturned faces. Among them were old men crushed by sorrow, and old men ruined by vice; aged women with faces that seemed to plead for pity, women that made you shrink from their unwomanly gaze; lionlike young men, made for heroes, but caught in the devil's trap and changed into beasts; and boys whose looks showed that sin had already stamped them with its foul insignia, and burned into their souls the shame which is to be one of the elements of its eternal punishment. A less impressible man than I would have felt moved at the sight of that throng of bruised and broken creatures. A hymn was read, and when Burnet, Kelsay, Neal, and others of the preachers struck up an old tune, voice after voice joined in the melody until it swelled into a mighty volume of sacred song. I noticed that the faces of many were wet with tears, and there was an indescribable pathos in their voices. The pitying God, amid the rapturous hal-lujahs of the heavenly hosts, bent to listen to the

music of these broken harps. This text was announced, "My peace I give unto you;" and the sermon began.

Among those standing nearest to me was "Old Kelley," a noted patient, whose monomania was the notion that he was a millionaire, and who spent most of his time in drawing checks on imaginary deposits for vast sums of money. I held one of his checks for a round million, but it has never yet been cashed. The old man pressed up close to me, seeming to feel that the success of the service somehow depended on him. I had not more than fairly begun my discourse, when he broke in: "That's Daniel Webster!"

I don't mind a judicious "Amen," but this put me out a little. I resumed my remarks, and was getting another good start, when he again broke in enthusiastically: "Henry Clay!"

The preachers standing around me smiled. I think I heard one or two of them titter. I could not take my eyes from Kelley, who stood with open mouth and beaming countenance, waiting for me to go on. He held me with an evil fascination. I did go on in a louder voice, and in a sort of desperation; but again my delighted hearer exclaimed: "Calhoun!"

"Old Kelley" spoiled that sermon, though he meant kindly. He died not long afterward, gloating over his fancied millions to the last.

"If you have steady nerves, come with me and I will show you the worst case we have—a woman half tigress and half devil."

Ascending a stairway, I was led to an angle of the building assigned to patients whose violence required them to be kept in close confinement.

"Hark! don't you hear her? She is in one of her paroxysms now."

The sounds that issued from one of the cells were like nothing I had ever heard before. They were a series of unearthly, fiendish shrieks, intermingled with furious imprecations, as of a lost spirit in an ecstasy of rage and fear.

The face that glared upon me through the iron grating was hideous, horrible. It was that of a woman, or of what had been a woman, but was now a wreck out of which evil passion had stamped all that was womanly or human. I involuntarily shrunk back as I met the glare of those fiery eyes, and caught the sound of words that made me shudder. I never suspected myself of being a coward, but I felt glad that the iron bars of the cell against which she dashed herself were strong. I had read of furies—one was now before me. The bloated, gin-inflamed face, the fiery-red, wicked eyes, the swinish chin, the tangled, coarse hair falling around her like writhing snakes, the tigerlike clutch of her dirty fingers, the horrible words—the picture was sickening, disgust for the time almost extinguishing pity.

"She was the keeper of a beer saloon in San Francisco, and led a life of drunkenness and licentiousness until she broke down, and she was brought here."

"Is there any hope of her restoration?"

"I fear not. Nothing short of a miracle can retune an instrument so fearfully broken and jangled."

I thought of her out of whom were cast the seven devils, and of Him who came to seek and to save the lost, and, resisting the impulse that prompted me to hurry away from the sight and hearing of this lost woman, I tried to talk with her, but had to retire at last amid a volley of such words as I hope never to hear from a woman's lips again.



"Listen! Did you ever hear a sweeter voice than that?"

I had heard the voice before, and thrilled under its power. It was a female voice of wonderful richness and volume, with a touch of something in it that moved you strangely—a sort of intensity that set your pulses to beating faster, while it entranced you. The whole of the spacious grounds were flooded with the melody, and the passing teamsters on the public highway would pause and listen with wonder and delight. The singer was a fair young girl, with dark auburn hair, large brown eyes, that were at times dreamy and sad, and then again lit up with excitement, as her moods changed from sad to gay.

"She will sit silent for hours, gazing listlessly out of the window, and then all at once break forth into a burst of song so sweet and thrilling that the other patients gather near her and listen in rapt silence and delight. Sometimes at a dead hour of the night her voice is heard, and then it seems that she is under a special *afflatus*—she seems to be inspired by the very soul of music, and her songs, wild and sad, wailing and rollicking, by turns, but all exquisitely sweet, fill the long night hours with their melody."

The shock caused by the sudden death of her betrothed lover overthrew her reason and blighted her life. By the mercy of God, the love of music and the gift of song survived the wreck of love and of reason. This girl's voice, pealing forth upon the still summer evening air, is mingled with my last recollection of Stockton and its refuge for the doubly miserable who are doomed to death in life.

## THE REBLOOMING.

IT is now more than thirty years since the morning a slender youth of handsome face and modest mien came into my office on the corner of Montgomery and Clay Streets, San Francisco. He was the son of a preacher well known in Missouri and California, a man of rare good sense, caustic wit, and many eccentricities. The young man became an *attaché* of my newspaper office and an inmate of my home. He was as fair as a girl, and refined in his taste and manners. A genial taciturnity, if the expression may be allowed, marked his bearing in the social circle. Everybody had a kind feeling and a good word for the quiet, bright-faced youth. In the discharge of his duties in the office he was punctual and trustworthy, showing not only industry, but unusual aptitude for business. It was with special pleasure that I learned that he was turning his thoughts to the subject of religion. During the services in the little Pine Street church he would sit with thoughtful face, and not seldom with moistened eyes. He read the Bible and prayed in secret. I was not surprised when he came to me one day and opened his heart. The great crisis in his life had come. God was speaking to his soul, and he was listening to his voice. The uplifted cross drew him, and he yielded to the gentle attraction. We prayed together, and henceforth there was a new and sacred bond that bound us to each other. I felt that I was a witness to the most solemn transaction that can take place on earth: the wedding of a soul to a heavenly faith. Soon