

peace. What did it mean? Not only was the burden gone, but there thrilled through my soul a quick, strong joy. My spirit was like a broad sea, alive all over with sunlit ripples, with one broad track of glory that stretched across into the unfathomable heaven! I felt the smile of God upon me. I felt the love of God within me. Was I insane? Had satan appeared to me as an angel of light and deceived me? Was this conversion? I was so much in doubt in regard to the real nature of this experience, that when I left the house I spoke to no one of it. Emerging into the open air, I found myself in a new world. I walked the streets as lightly as if wings had been upon my shoulders, lifting me from point to point through all the passage homeward. Ah, how blue the heavens were, and how broad and beautiful the world! What a blessed thing it was to live! How sweet were the faces not only of friends, but even of those whom I did not know! How gladly would I have embraced every one of them! It was as if I had been unclothed of my mortality, and clothed upon with the immortal. I was sure that heaven could hold no joy superior to that.

When passing Mr. Bradford's, I saw Millie at the window. She beckoned to me, and I went to her door. "How is it now?" she said.

"I don't know, Millie," I replied, "but I think it is all right. I never felt before as I do now."

"Oh, I was getting so tired!" said she. "I've been praying for you for days, and days, and days! and hoping and hoping you'd get through."

I could only thank her, and press her little hand; and then I hurried to my home, mounted to my room, shut and locked the door, and sat down to think.

CHAPTER X.

I JOIN A CHURCH THAT LEAVES OUT MR. BRADFORD AND MILLIE.

How shall I write the history of the few weeks that followed my new experience? I had risen, as on wings, from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. I had emerged from a valley of shadows, haunted by ten thousand forms of terror and shapes of anguish, and sat down upon the sunny hills of peace. The world, which had become either mocking or meaningless to me, was illuminated with loving expression in every feature. Far above the deep blue of the winter skies my imagination caught the sheen of winged forms and the far echoes of happy angel-voices. I lifted my face to the sun, and, shutting my eyes, felt the smile of God upon me. Every wind that blew brought its ministry of blessing. Every cloud that swept the sky bore its message of good-will from heaven. I loved life, I loved the world, I loved every living thing I saw, and, more than all, I loved the Great Father who had bestowed upon me such gracious gifts of hope and healing.

Mrs. Sanderson, though she had said little, and had received no confidence from me, had been troubled for many weeks. She had seen in my haggard eyes and weary look the evidences of a great trial and struggle; but without the power to enter into it, or to help me out of it, she had never done more than to ask me if, for my health's sake, it would not be better for me to attend fewer meetings and take more sleep. The weeks that followed were only more satisfactory to her from the conviction that I was happier, for I gave myself with hearty zeal to the work which I felt had been imposed upon me.

My father was happy in my new happiness, never doubting

that it had come to me through the Grace of Heaven. I was assured on every hand that I had passed through that change of regeneration which was the true basis in me, and in many at least, of the new life. Meeting Mr. Bradford, I spoke freely to him of my change, and he told me with a sigh that he was glad I was at peace. He evidently did not say all that he felt, but he said nothing to discourage me.

It soon became known to Mr. Grimshaw and the members of his church that I had become a convert, and I found abundant opportunities at once to exercise such gifts as I possessed to induce others to drink at the fountain from which I had drawn such draughts of peace and pleasure. I prayed in public; I exhorted; I went from one to another of my own age with personal persuasions. Nay, I was alluded to and held up, in public and private, as one of the most notable of the trophies which had been won in the great struggle with the powers of darkness through which the church had passed.

I look back now upon the public life that I lived in those youthful days with wonder. Audiences that I then faced and addressed without embarrassment would now send fever into my lips and tongue, or strike me dumb. I rejoiced then in a prominence from which I should now shrink with a sensitiveness of pain quite insupportable. I was the youthful marvel of the town; and people flocked again to the church where I was to be seen and heard as if a new Bedlow had come down to them from the skies.

This publicity did not please Mrs. Sanderson, but she saw farther, alas! than I did, and knew that such exaltation could not be perpetual. Could I have had a wise counsellor then, it would have saved me years of wandering and years of sorrow. The tendency of this public work was to make me vain, and induce a love of the sound of my own voice. Without experience, flattered by attention, stimulated by the assurance that I was doing a great deal of good, and urged on by my own delight in action, I fairly took the bit in my teeth, and ran such a race as left me at last utterly exhausted. I went from meeting

to meeting all over the city. There was hardly a church in which my voice was not heard. Everywhere I was thanked and congratulated. I did not realize then as I do now that I was moved by a thirst for praise, and that motives most human mingled strangely and strongly with the divine in urging me forward. O Heaven! to think that I, a poor child in life and experience, should have labored in Thy name to win a crown to my personal vanity!

I shudder now at the cruelty practiced upon the young nearly everywhere, in bringing them to the front, and exposing them to such temptations as those which then had the power to poison all my motives, to brush away from my spirit the bloom of youthful modesty, and to expose me to a process which was certain to ultimate in spiritual torpor and doubt. I always tremble and sicken when I behold a child or youth delighting in the exercises of a public exhibition; and when I see, inside or outside of church walls, children bred to boldness through the public show of themselves and their accomplishments, and realize what part of their nature is stimulated to predominance by the process, and what graces are extinguished by it, I do not wonder at the lack of reverence in American character, and that exhaustion of sensibility which makes our churches so faint and fitful in feeling.

Having given up all my earlier ideas of religion, and learned to regard them as wholly inadequate and unworthy, I could be in my new work little more than a parrot. I had passed through but a single phase of what I had learned to regard as a genuine religious experience, and my counsels were but the repetitions of what I had heard. If some wise man or woman could have told me of myself—of the proprieties that belong to the position of a neophyte—of the dangers of public labor, and of being publicly petted and exhibited, how well for me would it have been! But I had no such counsellor. On the contrary, I was seized upon at once as a fresh instrumentality for carrying on a work already waning. I am ashamed to think of the immodesty of some of my personal approaches to my elders whom I

regarded as needing my ministry, and humiliated by the memory of the considerate forbearance with which I was treated for religion's and my motive's sake.

It was in labors and experiences like these that a few weeks passed away. Another in-gathering of the great spiritual harvest approached. I, among others, was to make a public profession of my faith, and become a member of the church. Mr. Grimshaw put upon me the task of persuading the young of my own age to join me in this solemn self-dedication, and I had great success in my mission.

Among the considerable number whom I had selected as proper subjects of my counsels and persuasions, was my interesting friend Millie Bradford: but I knew she was quite too young to decide so momentous a question, and that her father would not permit her to decide it for herself. To tell the truth, I did not like to meet Mr. Bradford with my proposition, for I anticipated objections, and did not feel qualified to argue with him. I consulted with Mr. Grimshaw in regard to the case, and it was finally decided that we should visit Mr. Bradford together.

Accordingly we called upon him, and spent an evening in conversation, which, although it won no new members to my group, left a deep impression upon my mind and memory.

The conversation was begun by Mr. Grimshaw, who said: "We have called, Mr. Bradford, with the purpose of conferring with you in regard to your daughter Millie. I know but little of her, but I learn through Arthur that she is a sharer in the blessings of our great revival. Have you any objection to her union with our church, provided she shall choose to become a member?"

"Have you no invitation for any one else in the family?" inquired Mr. Bradford, with a smile.

"I was not aware that there were other converts in the family," responded the minister.

"I speak it with great humility, Mr. Grimshaw," said Mr. Bradford, "but I count myself a disciple. I am a learner at the

feet of your Master and mine; and I have been a learner for years. I do not regard myself as having attained, or fully apprehended, but I follow on, and I should like society on the way, as well as any one."

"But your views do not accord with those professed by our church," said Mr. Grimshaw.

"I do not know what business the church may legitimately have with my private opinions. I learn from the New Testament that he who repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. A man who does this belongs at least to the invisible church, and I do not recognize the right of a body of men calling themselves a church to shut out from their communion any man or woman who belongs to the church invisible, or any one whom the Master counts among his disciples."

"But we must have some standard of faith and belief," said Mr. Grimshaw.

"I suppose you must," responded Mr. Bradford, "but why should you construct it of non-essential materials? Why should you build a high fence around your church, and insist that every man shall climb every rail, when the first is all that the Master asks him to climb. I recognize repentance and trust as the basis of a Christian character and life, and I regard character as the one grand result at which the Author of Christianity aimed. He desired to make good men out of bad men; and repentance and trust form the basis of the process. When you go beyond this, with your dogmas and your creeds, you infringe upon the liberty of those whom repentance and trust have made free. Personally, I feel that I am suffering a great wrong, inflicted in ignorance and with good motives no doubt, but still a wrong, in that I am shut out from Christian sympathy and fellowship. I will not profess to believe any more than I do believe. It is simply impossible for me, a rational, honest, mature man, to accept that which you prescribe for me. I am perfectly willing that you should believe what seems to you to be true, touching all these points of doctrine. I only insist that you shall be a Christian in heart and life—an honest disci

ple. If you cannot give me the same liberty, under the same conditions, we can never get any nearer together."

"You seem to forget," responded the minister, "that our creed is the product of whole ages of Christian wisdom—that it has been framed by men of wide and profound experience, who have learned by that experience what is essential to the stability and purity of the church."

"And you seem to forget," said Mr. Bradford, "that the making and defense of creeds have rent the seamless garment of the Lord into ten thousand fragments—that they have been the instruments for the destruction of the unity of the church in fact and feeling—that they have not only been the subjects of controversies that have disgraced the church before the world, and embittered the relations of large bodies of Christians, but have instigated the cruelest persecutions and the most outrageous murders and martyrdoms. You are not so bigoted as to deny that there are Christians among all the sects; and you are liberal enough to give to the different sects the liberty of faith which they claim. The world is growing better in this thing, and is not so intolerant as it was. Now, why will you not give me the same liberty, as a man, that you give to churches founded on creeds at variance with yours? You invite the teachers of other sects into your pulpit. You invite their people to your communion table, while you shut me away by conditions that are just as impossible to me as they would be to them."

I could see that Mr. Grimshaw was not only overwhelmed in argument but deeply moved in feeling. He grasped Mr. Bradford's hand, and said: "My dear sir, it would give me one of the greatest pleasures of my life to receive you into our communion, for I believe in your sincerity and in your character, but I could not if I would."

"I know it," responded Mr. Bradford: "your sympathies go beyond your creed, and your most earnest convictions stop short of it. Your hands are tied, and your tongue must be dumb. You and your church will go on in the old way. The

young who do not think, and the mature who will not try to think, or do not dare to try, will accept what you prescribe for them. Women, more trustful and religious than men, will constitute the majority of your members. In the mean time, the thinking men—the strong, influential, practical men of society—the men of culture, enterprise, and executive power—will remain outside of the church—shut out by a creed which their reason refuses to accept."

"I am afraid the creed is not altogether to blame for their exclusion," said the minister. "'Not many wise'—you remember the quotation."

"When Christianity was an apostasy from a church to which all the wise and mighty were attached," replied Mr. Bradford, "your quotation was doubtless true as a statement of fact, but we belong to another nation and age. I hold myself a type and representative of a large class, who cannot enter the church without self stultification and a sacrifice of that liberty of thought and opinion which is their birthright. We cannot afford to do without you, and you cannot afford to do without us. It is your business to make a home for us, for we are all passing on to that stage and realm of being where opinions will be of small account, and where character will decide everything."

"We have wandered very far from your daughter, Mr. Bradford, about whom we came to talk," said Mr. Grimshaw.

An expression of pain passed over Mr. Bradford's face. Then he rose, and walking to a door which closed another room, opened it, and called his daughter. Millie entered the room with a question in her eyes, and shaking hands with us, went to her father's side, where she stood with his arm around her during the remainder of the interview.

"Millie," said her father, "Mr. Grimshaw and Arthur have come here to invite you to join the church. Would you like to do so?"

"If you and mamma think I ought to," she replied.

At this moment, Mrs. Bradford, conjecturing, I suppose, the object of our visit, entered the room, and giving us a most

friendly greeting, took a seat near her daughter. Mr. Bradford repeated our proposal to her, and Millie's reply to it.

"I should regard it as one of the sweetest satisfactions of my life to have my child with me in church communion," she said, looking down to hide the tears that she felt filling her eyes.

"And I sympathize with you entirely in your feeling," added Mr. Bradford.

"Then," said Mr. Grimshaw, "nothing will stand in the way, provided, upon examination, your daughter gives evidence of an intelligent entrance upon a Christian experience."

"Which means, I suppose," said Mr. Bradford, "that if she will accept your whole creed and scheme on trust, as well as give evidence of having determined upon a Christian life, you will endow her with the privileges of membership."

"We have but one condition for all, as you know," responded the minister.

"I suppose so; and it is my duty to tell you that it is a very cruel thing; for her intelligence reaches no further than the one essential thing which makes her a Christian child, viz., personal loyalty to the Master. Beyond this she knows absolutely nothing, and for her it is enough. To insist that she shall receive a whole body of divinity about which she is utterly ignorant, and which, at present, has no relation to her Christian character and life, is to do that which you have no right to do. When Jesus took little children in his arms and blessed them, and declared that of such was the kingdom of heaven, he did not impose any conditions upon them. It was sufficient for him that they were in his arms, and had trust and confidence enough to nestle and be contented and happy there. You take the responsibility of going beyond him, and of making conditions which cannot be complied with without a surrender of all future liberty of thought and opinion. You have members in your church to-day who committed themselves to opinions when young, or under excitement, that they now hold most loosely, or with questionings that are a constant torture to them. I know it, for they have told me so; and I can

not consent that my child shall be denied the free and unrestrained formation of opinions when her maturer mind becomes able to form them. The reason that has no range but the bounds of a creed, constructed by human hands, will become dwarfed as certainly as the wings of a bird are weakened by the wires of a cage."

Mr. Grimshaw listened attentively to the speaker, and then said: "I fear that your ideas would form a very poor basis for a church. We should be deprived of any principle or power of cohesion, without unity of belief. Such liberty as you desire, or seem to think desirable, would soon degenerate into license. The experience of the church has proved it, and the united wisdom of the church has declared it."

"My ideas of the true basis of the church are very simple," said Mr. Bradford. "I would make it an organization of Christian disciples—of Christian learners; you would make it a conservatory of those who have arrived at the last conclusions in dogmatic theology. I would make it a society of those who have accepted the Master, and pledged their hearts and lives to him, with everything to learn and the liberty to learn it by such means as they can command; you would frame it with limits to all progress. You would make it a school where all are professors; I would make it a school where all are learners. In short, you would make a sectarian church, and I would make a Christian church; and I cannot but believe that there is such a church awaiting us in the future—a church which will receive both me and my daughter, to give me the rest and fellowship I long for, and her the nurture, restraint and support which she will need among the world's great temptations."

I do not know what the minister thought of all this, for he said but little. He had been accustomed to these discussions with Mr. Bradford, and either deemed them unfruitful of good or found it difficult to maintain his position. He felt sure of me, and did not regard it of consequence to talk on my account. As Mr. Bradford closed, he sighed and said:

"Well, Millie, I suppose you will do as your father wishes and stay away from us."

Millie looked at her father and then at her mother, with a quick, earnest glance of inquiry.

Mrs. Bradford said: "Mr. Bradford and I never differ on anything relating to our child. So far as our creed is concerned I am entirely content with it; but I have no wish to commit my child to it, though I freely instruct her in it."

"Very well," said the minister, "perhaps it will be better to leave her with you for the present."

Then he advanced to Mr. Bradford for a private conference (upon some other subject, apparently, and Millie started quickly and walked to the window where I joined her.

"Are n't you sorry?" I inquired.

"No."

"I thought you would be," I said.

"No, it is all right. Father knows. Don't you think he's splendid?"

"I suppose he thinks he is right," I responded.

"Why, I know he's right," she said warmly. "He's always right; and isn't it sweet of him to let me hear him talk about everything?"

Here was the personal loyalty again. Beyond this the girl could not go. She could trust her father and her Master. She could obey both and love both, and it was all of religion that she was capable of. I supposed that the minister must know better than any of us, but I had no doubt of Millie's fitness for the church, and wondered why it was that a baptized child should be shut out of the fold by a creed she was utterly incapable of comprehending. I confess, too, that I sympathized with Mr. Bradford's view of the church as it related to himself, yet I had given my trust to the minister, and it was only my personal loyalty to him that reconciled me to his opposing opinions. Then there flashed upon me the consciousness that I was to profess before God and men a belief in dogmas that I had not even examined, and was entirely without the power of

explaining or defending to myself or others. The fact made me tremble, and I dismissed it as soon as possible.

I fear that I should weary my reader by dwelling upon the spiritual experiences that attended the assumption of my vows. Since the memorable day on which I stood among twenty others, and publicly pledged my life to the Redeemer, and gave my unqualified assent to the doctrines of the creed, I have never been able to witness a similar scene without tears. With all the trust natural to youth I received that which was presented to me, and with all the confidence of youth in its own power to fulfill its promises, I entered into the most solemn covenant which man can make. There was no suspicion in me of a possible reaction. There was no anticipation of temptations before which I should tremble or fall. There was no cloud that portended darkness or storm. I regarded myself as entering a fold from which I should go out no more, save under the conduct and ward of a Shepherd who would lead me only through green pastures and beside still waters.

All my friends, including Mrs. Sanderson, were present. Mr. Bradford and his family sat near me, and I saw that he had been deeply moved. He read the future better than I, and saw before my intense and volatile spirit that which I could not see. He knew the history of one human heart, and he interpreted the future of mine by his own. At the close of the services Mrs. Sanderson drove home alone with Jenks; and the Bradfords with Henry and my own family walked home together. As I left my father at his door, with Henry and Claire, I found myself with Millie. We fell behind her father and mother, and after she had looked around to make sure that she was not observed, she unfolded her handkerchief and showed me a crumb of the sacramental bread.

"Where did you get it?" I inquired.

"I prayed that it might drop when it was handed to my mother, and it did," she replied.

"What are you going to do with it?" I inquired.

"I am going to my room when I get home, and have a communion all by myself."

"But do you think it will be right?" I inquired.

"I don't think *He* will care. *He* knows that I love him, and that it is the only chance I have. It is his bread, and came from his table, and Mr. Grimshaw has nothing to do with it."

I was dumb with astonishment, and could offer no remonstrance. Indeed I sympathized with her so much that I could not have deprived her of her anticipated enjoyment.

Then I asked her what she would do for wine.

"I shall kiss my mother's lips," she replied, and then added: "I wonder if she will know that anything is gone, as the Saviour did when the woman touched him?"

I think if I could have retired with Millie to her seclusion, and shared her crumb away from the eyes of a curious world, and the distractions of the public gaze, I should have come out stronger and purer for the feast. I left her at her door, and went slowly home, imagining the little girl at prayer, and tasting the crumb which had fallen from the Master's table. The thought of the reverent kiss which the mother was to receive that night, all unconscious of the draught of spiritual comfort which her child would quaff there, quite overcame me.

And it was this child, with her quick insight and implicit faith, that had been shut out of the fold because she had no opinions! It was her father, too, carefully seeking and prayerfully learning, who had been refused admittance, because he would not surrender his reason and his liberty of thought! Already I began to doubt the infallibility of my Pope. Already there had crept into my mind the suspicion that there was something wrong in a policy which made more of sound opinions than of sound character. Already I felt that there was something about these two persons that was higher in Christian experience than anything I could claim. Already I had become dimly conscious of a spiritual pride in myself, that I did not see in them, and convinced that they were better fitted to adorn a Christian profession than myself.

So the struggle was over, and I was called upon by the rapidly advancing spring to resume the studies which had long been interrupted. As I addressed myself with strong determination to my work, I was conscious of a greatly impaired power of application. The effect of the winter's excitement and absorption had been to dissipate my mental power, and destroy my habits of mental labor. It took me many weeks to get back upon my old track, and I was led through many discouragements. When I had fairly accomplished my purpose and felt that I was making genuine progress, I discovered that it was impossible to keep up the public life I had been leading and the zeal which had spurred me on in my Christian work. For weeks I faithfully continued my attendance on the meetings of the church, which, by becoming less frequent, had adapted themselves somewhat to my new circumstances, but to my great sorrow I found my zest in their exercises gradually dying away. I prayed often and long that I might not become a back-slider, and that the joy and comfort of the early days might abide with me. It was all in vain. The excitement of sympathetic crowds and the predominance of a single topic in the public mind had passed away, and, unsupported by those stimuli, I was left to stand alone—an uncertain, tottering, self-suspicious youth—with the great work of life all before me.

Gradually the old motives which had actuated me came back and presented themselves; and to my sad surprise they found that in me which responded to them. The wealth which had held before me its glittering promise still possessed its charming power, and suggested its worldly delights. The brilliant college career which I had determined to achieve for honor's and glory's sake came up to me among my suspended purposes, and shone with all its old attractions. The pride of dress and social position was not dead—it had only slept, and waited but a touch and a nod to spring into life again. The temptations which the world held for my sensuous nature found my appetites and passions still unsubdued.

Then there came upon me first the conviction and the con-

sciousness that my life was to be one of warfare, if it was to be a Christian life at all—that I was really back upon my old ground, and that whatever of genuine progress I should make would be through prayerful, rigid, persistent culture. That there was something unspeakably discouraging in this, I need not affirm. It had the power to make the experiences through which I had so recently passed seem altogether hollow and unreal. I had only dreamed of regeneration, after all. The new birth had only been the birth of a purpose, which needed nursing and strengthening and educating like an infant.

Still I would not, could not, admit that I had not made the genuine beginning of a religious life. If I had done this, I should have grown callous or desperate at once.

And now I beg the privilege of saying to those who may be interested in this narrative, that I have not addressed myself to the task of writing down revivals. I am detailing the experiences of a human soul. That revivals are useful in communities where great excitements are necessary to attract the attention of the careless and the vicious, I can well believe. That multitudes begin a religious life through their influence there is no doubt. That they are dangerous passages for the church to pass through would seem also to be well established, as by the laws of the human mind all great excitements and all extraordinary labors are followed by corresponding depressions and exhaustions. I seriously doubt whether Christian growth is greatly forwarded by these exceptional agencies. All true growth in the realm of nature is the result of a steady unfolding from a germ: and the realm of grace is ruled by the same Being who perfects the flower and builds the tree. I can afford to be misconstrued, misunderstood and misrepresented if I can do anything to direct the attention of the church to the fact that there are better methods of progress than those which are attended with such cost and such danger, and that in the Christian nurture of children and the wide opening of the Christian fold to them abides the hope of the church and the world. I shall be ten thousand times repaid for any suspicion of my mo-

tives, if I can bring a single pastor, or a single church, to the realization of the fact that true Christian beginnings are not necessarily conformed to any special dramatic experience; that a pastor can lead his flock better than a stranger whose voice they do not know, and that their creeds are longer and more elaborate than they have any right to make. If the labor expended upon revivals were spread evenly over greater space, and applied with never-flagging persistency to the shaping and the nurture of the plastic and docile minds of the young, I am sure that the Christian kingdom would increase in numbers and advance in power by a progress at once natural, healthy and irresistible. The fiery shower that pours its flood upon the earth in an hour, leaves the ground fresh for the day, but it also leaves it scarred and seamed, the swollen torrents carrying half its wealth into the sea, while the steady rain of days sinks into the earth to nourish the roots of all things, and make the springs perennial.

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