

Wm George Carr

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WONSTON TRACTS.

THE DUSTY BIBLE.



THIRTY-SEVENTH THOUSAND.

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THE DUSTY BIBLE.

THERE can hardly be a greater folly than that of so many young persons, who put off attending to religion because they are young. They think that as they love the world, they shall be excused for going the way of the world :—that is, they plead one great sin as an excuse for another great sin.

Besides the wicked and foolish provoking of God, which such conduct shews, it is also very cruel ; for there is perhaps no pang more severe—no grief more heart-breaking, than that produced in an affectionate christian parent, by seeing a child go on the broad road—in the way of the world, the end of which is destruction. Those fathers and mothers who have felt this pang can alone tell of this agony.

Yet how beautifully does the wisdom of God bring forth sweet fruit out of the mixture of those two bitter things—the perverse folly of a world-loving child, and the agonizing trial of a christian parent's affection. The parent's heart must be tried and purified, as silver is purified, seven times in the fire : the child's danger and folly makes the furnace so hot that it draws forth an earnestness of prayer, and a perseverance in the patient use of means, which is at last successful in bringing the child to the Saviour. And when the furnace has thus had its full effect in purifying the parent's heart, it casts its coals of fire upon the head of the child ; who then begins to feel the reproaches of conscience for having so long tortured the tenderness of the parent. And thus the purifying influence passes from the parent to the child, to make both meet for that eternal joy, of which both would have fallen short but for the blessed effects of the fiery trial that was to try them, and fit their affections for the heavenly inheritance.

A circumstance occurred a few years ago, which will serve to shew plainly these feelings and their effects.

A worthy christian mother was left a widow, in the city of Oxford, with only one son. She laboured hard to support him and herself; and at last got him apprenticed to a carpenter. He learned his trade; and having passed through his apprenticeship, was able, as a journeyman, to gain bread for himself and his mother. She had diligently sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, both for herself and for her son; and God had, according to his promise, added the necessary things of this life: but it did not seem to be His pleasure to add also the things of the life to come for her boy. He grew up a civil lad, but very much like other lads in the world. There was nothing to comfort the widowed mother with the hope that "old things had passed away, and all things had become new, and all things were of God," in his heart. While he was a boy he did as he was bid;—he read the chapter in the Bible every evening as he was told;—he learned the Sunday School lessons by portions every day, (except now and then; when, for his neglect, he was sent to bed without his supper;)—he got a prize at School for saying most verses by rote; and he occasionally brought home some good conduct tickets. But to the anxious and observing attention of the mother, there were no marks of spiritual life—no special love of good things—no fear of temptation; he said his prayers; but many things shewed that he did not know what it was to pray with the heart.

The mother sighed and prayed; and from time to time went into her chamber, and wept, and prayed again; and she did all that her heart could suggest to draw her dear boy to the love of Christ. Yet still there were no signs of life, such as she longed for.

But now he was quite a man—at least he thought himself so; and the short step which was wanting in his years to bring him to manhood, only made

him put on more pretensions to manly independence. He could not see any harm in doing as other young men did:—a game of cricket on Sunday afternoon, *after Church*—only *after Church*;—what harm could there be in that? To be sure mother disapproved of it, and mother was a very good woman? but she could not expect him to be as good as she was—could she? So he went cricketing of a Sunday, at first in the afternoon, and afterwards all day—at first slipping out of the house unseen by his mother; or staying till she was gone to church, and then fancying she would not have minded if she had been at home:—at last boldly, with the bat and stumps in his hand before her face: aye, and in spite of her tears that silently trickled down her face.

Things went on so for many a month; pleasure was the object of poor Andrew's affection. He never meant to do any thing bad, as he said—never went to excesses. But why did mother make herself so unhappy when he went to the fair or to the races—that was her foolishness; surely so many people could not all be wrong; only mother set herself up to be more religious than other folks. How could she expect him, so young, to be so good. He laid it all to the preaching of that parson, who preached such uncharitable sermons, sending every body to hell but just a few hypocrites:—he had told her not to go to that church and she would go;—it was her fault if she went and got melancholy—he would not go there again for anything—not he.

Such thoughts occupied Andrew in the midst of his worldly ways: when, in spite of himself, he could not help being heavy at heart at his mother's mournful look and sorrowing eye.—What a shocking thing that RELIGION is, which makes people so melancholy, and breaks up the comfort of a family, because the children will be like other young people! Yes, this thought of Andrew's is the common lie with which Satan turns away the power of those

dear affections of the heart that, according to our first nature, might draw a child by the bonds of love to the guidance of a godly parent. Like other young people! Where does the path of worldly young people lead them? Does it lead them to Christ? Oh no!—It leads them from God to the place where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched: there it leaves them to count the value of the by-gone worldly pleasures; for which, when in the body, they were willing to give their souls; which prevailed with them to forget God and eternity, in the bustling enjoyment of the present hour without God.

Andrew's mother made many attempts to awaken her son from his dreams of worldly pleasure and forgetfulness of God. At first they were received by him kindly,—then coldly,—then angrily; and at last the subject was so painful that it was seldom alluded to; and it seemed, as far as Andrew was concerned, to be forgotten. The mother determined to make one more appeal to his heart. She chose his birthday when he came to the age of twenty-one. She had deprived herself of many little comforts, and had laid by a small sum, with which she bought a very nice well bound convenient Bible; and on the morning of the day he came of age, when she got his breakfast, before he went to his work, she blessed him, and poured out all the fondness of an affectionate mother's heart, while she made him a present of this Bible. After tenderly warning him of his spiritual danger, she earnestly begged of him one special favour; which was, that he would promise her to read a portion of that holy book, if it were ever so little, once in the course of each day. She pressed this upon him, as the special desire of his only parent.

Andrew received her present very kindly—thanked her with some warmth—assured her of his affection and gratitude—said he would certainly behave better

than he had done, for the future: and at last upon her repeated request, he made the promise she desired him. The mother had not done all this without prayer; and she retired to her room, and spread her case before the throne of grace, with earnest petitions that for Christ's sake, God would bless this last attempt to bring him under the power of the Holy Spirit.

The mother felt that it would be wise to leave the matter where she had placed it; and that it might be a snare to him if she troubled him with questions as to whether he performed his promise: but it was the one object of her heart; and she could not rest without some means of finding out whether he read the Bible every day. She lived with her son in a small tenement, which consisted of a kitchen and a wash house below, and two decent bed-rooms above; when she went into his bedroom, she found that he had laid the Bible upon the little mantel-piece which was opposite the door; and finding day after day when she went to arrange his room, that it remained in the same place, she bethought her of a means by which she might know whether it was ever used. She was a cleanly tidy person, and known amongst her neighbours for the neatness of her house. It was her custom very frequently to sweep the bed-rooms, and she determined always to leave the Bible on the mantel-shelf, without letting her duster or brush come near. In consequence of this her very diligence in cleansing every other part of the room, made the more dust to fall upon this neglected shelf; and she was thereby enabled to see if, at any time, the Bible had been removed from its place.

Week passed after week, and month after month. When she went each morning into her son's room, as her anxious eye fell upon the Bible, she too plainly observed that no finger had been laid upon it—no alteration could have taken place in its position on the shelf, for the thickening dust was un-

disturbed upon its binding. Her heart sickened, but she lifted it up to the throne of grace—"Merciful Father, for Christ's sake, give the Holy Spirit to turn the heart of my child, that he perish not with the world that lieth in wickedness." Oh! how often did such a prayer as this burst from her heart. Though the only language by which it was expressed was the silent trickling down of her tears, yet God heard that voice. (Psa. vi. 8; lvi. 8.) He did not, however, seem to hear the voice of this widow's weeping: for her son only grew more settled in his worldly course—more fond of his worldly companions—he shewed less feelings of conscience about his ways, and less attention to the feelings of his poor mother.

The mother had a tender heart—loving by nature, softened by grace. She could not bear the continual agony of hopeless alarm for the eternal condition of one so dear to her: Affliction, while it ripened her spirit, had undermined her strength of mind and of body, and this heavy burthen broke it at last. She pined even while she prayed—her heart declined. Andrew was sorry, for he soon found his mother's illness very inconvenient and expensive too. A heart that gives itself to worldly pleasures empties itself of the feelings of its best affections, and settles into a mass of selfishness. Andrew's heart had well nigh come to this. His mother was long in her bed, and day after day he expected to find her dying or dead, when he came from his work. He grew accustomed to the thought, and even began to wonder that it was so long put off. The poor mother, on the other hand, was longing and watching for his life, in the true sense of living. She managed to get her bed's head so placed in her little chamber, that as she lay, she could look through the door into the opposite room and just include the mantel-shelf in the range of her view. She took care to instruct the woman who was now hired to

attend to the house, in what way to sweep her son's chamber, and never to touch the mantel-shelf. She would have the door placed open when her son was gone to work; and as she looked across, it was quite plain that the Bible was as dusty as ever;—it had never been touched. It withered her heart afresh every morning; but she failed not to put up her prayer.

Andrew was very fond of music. He played the clarionet, and had a good voice, and was a great man amongst all the Club bands in the neighbourhood. He often went for the sake of the music into company which he knew was not what it should be. There happened to be a great fair held about twenty miles from Oxford, where several young men were engaged to the house of a friend, who had just married and set up a public-house in the place where the fair was held. There was to be a house-warming, and especially some music, and Andrew could not be excused from the party—impossible. To be sure his mother was very ill indeed—even dying—but so she had been for some weeks, and she would live no doubt till he returned—he only meant to stay two days. Not to distress his mother he did not bid her good-bye when he set out. The indulgence in his worldly amusements had deadened all the feeling which would have made him think much of such a neglect; and it led him, on the contrary, to think so much of the musical party they were to have, that it seemed to be of the greatest importance to be there, and in time.

He had not been gone many hours before his poor mother's trial of heart was over. She had been left by the attendant woman after breakfast, rather better apparently. The doors were placed open as usual, and the woman went to wash for her own family. When she returned she found but a corpse—the spirit had left the poor painful clay—the eyes were turned towards the dusty Bible, but they were

glazed and lifeless—the broken heart beat no more. The mother had passed through the furnace, purified seven times in the fire, she was safely waiting for the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. iv. 17.) The woman was much distressed, especially as Andrew was away, and had left no clear account of where he was gone to. Perhaps he did this on purpose, for fear he might be interrupted in the *important object* of his journey by unpleasant news. The neighbours shewed great feeling;—every thing was done in proper order—the coffin made—the funeral prepared; and very likely they felt that it would only be what Andrew deserved, if he had the shame of finding that, when he returned from the fair, strangers had shewn more respect for his mother than he had, in leaving her in her dying state to seek his own pleasure.

Three days passed; and the funeral was to take place in the evening, when Andrew arrived, full of the vanity of his musical talents, which had procured him great praise at the house-warming. It struck a blow at his heart to find that his mother was dead, and about to be buried. He said little, and seemed to feel little; but he was benumbed, chilled, struck, and had not yet time to recover. He prepared himself for the funeral, and followed the coffin to the grave;—the earth was committed to the earth, ashes to ashes. There were still no signs of feeling in him—he said nothing. He looked into the grave when the service was over;—the neighbours did so also: there seemed no difference; and a stranger could not have said which was the orphan. Nobody spoke till Andrew walked away; but when he was gone, even the very lads who were helping the sexton in covering the coffin, volunteering the work with as little feeling as the clods which they rattled over the lid—even these spoke out the ready remark that “Andrew didn’t care much for his mother’s death.”

Andrew walked home: and upon entering the house, he went up straight to his bedroom. He sat down on his bed-side, and remained some time in the same bewildered and benumbed state of feeling. At length his eyes fell upon the Bible on the mantel-shelf, which had lain so long untouched. Its dusty condition brought to his mind the thought how completely it had been neglected; and then came the recollection of his mother's birth-day gift, and birth-day advice, and birth-day blessing; and then his promise to read it every day rushed into his mind; and then its thick coat of dust, which proved that the promise had been broken every day, spoke to his conscience at last, to raise up an agony of shame,—it burst the chain that had bound up his feelings, and produced a flood of tears, heartfelt and bitter.

After waiting for some time, Andrew walked to the shelf, took up the dusty Bible, and opened it for the first time since he had received it with such marks of tender affection from his departed mother. The pages divided at the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, and the part that caught his eye was the 16th verse. He read that and the two following verses. They were the sword of the Spirit, with the sharp blade of which his heart was pierced effectually. (Heb. iv. 12.) His mother's prayers had been heard from the beginning, even while she was speaking: the waiting *for God's own good time* was just the fiery trial which was to try her, and fit her for eternal enjoyment with the saints in light. God's own good time did not arrive till she was ripened; and being ready, was gathered into his garner. Then it was not delayed a moment; and the apparently trifling circumstance, which had been the immediate cause producing [the godly discipline and trying pain of heart of the son for himself; the dusty Bible just shewed what is meant by God's numbering all the hairs of our head. The mother's

heart had been taken out of the furnace; and the same fire was kept alive for the purifying of the son's heart, which was put into it.

'This "godly sorrow," thus produced in Andrew, turned out to be the true "pricking in the heart," like that felt by the three thousand first christians on the day of Pentecost. (Acts ii. 37.) The real change was begun in him; and gradually "old things passed away, and all things became new, and all things were of God." The alteration in his way of going on proved the change;—he altered his companions—his pleasures—his occupations; shewing that God had altered his desires and his affections. He was still young; but he now found that the sooner in life the change takes place, the greater the power and blessedness of the work, since the strength of the youthful days may still be given to the Lord. But poor Andrew's enjoyment of religion, in all his christian course has been checked by the abiding pang which arises at every recollection of his poor suffering mother. Years have now passed: but many are the tears he still sheds over the remembrance of his unfeeling cruelty to so tender a parent; whose misery arose only from her earnest desire to impart to him that which he now feels he was so foolish, as well as wicked, in refusing. He knows with assurance of faith that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; and he humbly trusts that this his great sin is included in the cleansing. He has learned too that the very suffering of his mother's heart was made the means of blessed purification to her soul. But with all this, he feels that though there is a need that offences should come for the trial of God's people, yet there is a woe also to him by whom the offence cometh. He experiences that woe, in the continual heaviness of heart that lies upon him; and which he would not be able to bear, were it not that he looks to Him, who, having borne the condemnation of that

sin, leaves the sinner under the conviction and self-reproach of it, only that, after he has suffered awhile, his faith, though it be tried with this fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. i. 7.)

The circumstances recorded in this Tract are true. —The Dusty Bible is no imagined incident; and is one illustration out of thousands, which shew the dealings of God in bringing His people out of the world, and in training them for heaven. Christian Parents!—do not grow weary, nor faint in your mind; but lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. (Heb. xii. 3, 11, 12.) —It is heart-breaking to watch a worldly child: but cease not to say “though God slay me yet will I trust in Him.” (Job xii. 15.)—Continue in faithful and earnest prayer; and, in *God’s own good time*, the answer will be manifested. Children! who foolishly think there is yet time—who fancy that youth is an excusable period of worldly indulgence, take warning by Andrew. The certain effect of worldly indulgence is to blunt and deaden those feelings which might affect us towards better things; and thus it cuts off the means of retreat from the destructive way. But, even if you should be hereafter brought to spiritual life; what a bitter medicine you are preparing for yourselves!—what burthening of conscience—what heaviness of heart you are storing up for the time when you may awaken to see things in the light by which you ought to see them now. And suppose you should never come under the power of true religion till you are taken out of this world; then you will no longer find Christ ready to bear the heavy burden for you—What will you do then?—It will be too late! (Prov. i. 7—10, 22, 23.)

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