

CAPTAIN BALL'S EXPERIENCE.

AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.

"I have had a strange experience," said Captain Ball, speaking with much emotion. "It began about three weeks ago. I had lately been making some very good trades; and one night I was riding home reckoning up my gains, and feeling a pride and triumph in the start I had got in the world by my own shrewdness and exertions. It was starlight and very still; I could hardly hear a noise but the field crickets and the tramp of my horse on the dark road, when suddenly a voice said, 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

"Was it actually a voice?" I questioned.

"No; I knew it wasn't at the time. It was, I have no doubt, my own mind; or rather, the voice of the Holy Spirit in the conscience. But the expression was just as distinct and unexpected as if it had been spoken by some person in my ear. I went to talk with my minister. I wanted to get into the church where I thought I should be safe. I had no conception of repentance and change of heart. I supposed our pastor would commence questioning me about doctrines, and so forth, to let me know what I would have to understand and believe before I could become a church member. But he didn't take any such course. He made me go into the house and sit down in his study, where he talked to me a long time about the blessedness of religion, and its value above all other things in this world, independently of its rewards hereafter. Then he said:

"Do you know the first thing to be done if you would be a Christian?"

"I do not know."

"The Christian life—the life of a faithful follower of Jesus Christ," said he, "can be founded only upon repentance. Now, it is easy to say we repent, but the only repentance that is worth anything is an active repentance—by which I mean not only sorrow for sin, and an earnest desire to avoid it in the future, but one that goes to work, and seeks, as far as is in its power, to make amends for every wrong we have ever done. Is there a person in the world, Captain Ball, who can look you in the face and say you have wronged him?"

"He knew my weak point," added the Captain. "Every man has his weak point, and I suppose the lancet must be applied there first. That question was like sharp-scratching steel driven to the soul. I writhed and groaned inwardly, and struggled and perspired a long time before I could answer. I saw it was going to be dreadful hard for me to be a Christian. I meant, however, to get off as easily as I could. So I determined to confess something which I suppose was known to everybody who knows me—my horse trade with Peter Simmons last spring.

"Did you wrong Peter?" asked the minister.

"I shaved him a little," said I.

"How much do you think?" said he.

"I let him have a ring-boned and wind-broken nag that I had physicked up to look pretty gay—worth for actual service not over ten dollars, and got in return a steady beast worth sixty dollars, and twenty-five to boot. So I honestly think," said I, "that I shaved him out of about seventy-five dollars."

"And with seventy-five dollars in your possession belonging to poor Peter Simmons, do you think you can commence a life of Christian purity? Do you think that Christ will hear your prayers for pardon

with stolen money in your pocket?" said the minister.

"I said something about a trade is a trade, and men must look out for themselves when they swap horses—but he cut me short.

"Your own soul," he said, "will not admit the excuses which your selfishness invents."

"But the rule you apply," said I, "will cut off the heads of church members as well as mine. There's Deacon Rich; he trades in horses, and shaves when he can."

"No matter," said he, "whose head is cut off; no matter what Deacon Rich does. You have to deal with your own soul, and with the Lord. And I will tell you, whether you are out of the church or in it, a single dollar which you have unjustly and knowingly taken from any man without rendering him its full value to the best of your ability—a single dollar, I say, will be like a mill-stone hung about your neck, to sink your soul into the sea of spiritual death!"

"I couldn't stand that. The Spirit of God used those words with terrible effect upon my heart. I was greatly agitated. The truth spoken by the pastor appealed to my understanding with irresistible power. I went away, but I couldn't rest. So I took seventy-five dollars and went to Peter and paid him, making him promise not to tell anybody, for I was ashamed to have it known that I was conscience-stricken and had paid back the money.

"Then I went to the minister again and told him what I had done. He didn't praise me as I thought he would. He took it as a matter of course, and no more merit in me than it is to wash my hands before I sit down to supper. On the contrary, he seemed to think that my hands were not quite clean yet. He wanted to know if I had wronged anybody else beside Peter. I tried to say no, but my conscience wouldn't let me. I could have told a plumper lie than that without flinching—yes, and flattered my own heart to believe the lie. I was discouraged. I felt bitterly disheartened. It was, indeed, so much harder being a Christian than I supposed, that I regretted going to talk with the minister at all. Like the young man who had great possessions, I was on the point of going away sorrowful. But my heart burned within me, and I was forced to speak.

"In the way of business," said I, "no doubt I have taken advantage here and there—as church members themselves do when they can."

"What everybody does is no rule for you and me, Captain Ball," said the minister. "It is to be Christians in a full sense—not simply church members—that we must strive with all our hearts. The fact of our being in the fold does not make the lamb; there are wolves in the fold, alas! but we are by no means justified in doing as the wolves do, even when they appear in sheep's clothing."

"I felt the rebuke. 'Well,' said I, 'there is Deacon Rich—I think he paid me a note twice. The first time he paid it we were transacting other business, and by some mistake the note wasn't destroyed. I found it among my papers afterwards. I was a good deal excited, and lay awake more than one night thinking what I ought to do about it. The Deacon was a hard man, I considered, and took advantage of people when he could. He had driven more than one hard bargain with me.'"

The Deacon, who was present, and heard the allusions to himself, whined and coughed uneasily. Captain Ball went on without appearing to mind him.

"So," said I to the minister, "I concluded I would serve the Deacon

as he would probably have served me under the same circumstances.

"I kept the note by me a good while, and when I thought the particulars of our settlement had slipped his mind, I said to him one day, maybe he would like to take up that note, which had been due then a considerable time. He was surprised—looked excited and angry—said he had paid it, and held out stoutly for awhile; but there was the note. There was no proof that it had ever been paid, and finally he took out his pocketbook, and, with some pretty hard words, paid it over again with interest."

"And now," said the minister, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I suppose," said I, "the money must be paid back."

"So I went to the Deacon the next day, told him that, on reflection, I was convinced that he was right and I was wrong about the payment of the note, and returned the money—one hundred and thirteen dollars—a good deal to his astonishment.

"I hoped then all was right," continued Captain Ball. "I tried to satisfy my conscience that it was. But I was afraid to go back to the minister, he had such a way of stirring up the conscience and finding mud at the bottom when we flattered ourselves that because it was out of sight there was no impurity there. And I knew as long as I dreaded to see the minister something must be wrong; and on looking carefully into my heart I found the little matter of a mortgage which I had foreclosed on a poor man, and got away his farm, when he had no suspicion but I would give him time to redeem it. By that means I had got into my possession property worth two thousand dollars, for which I did not actually pay, and for which Isaac never actually realized more than half that amount. But the proceedings were legal, and so I tried to excuse myself. But my awakened conscience kept saying, 'You have taken a poor man's land without giving him a just return; the law of God condemns you, although the law of man sanctions the wrong. You shall have no peace of soul; your heart will burn you, until, with justice, you wipe out your own injustice to him, and to all others whom you have wronged.'

"Against the decree of conscience I rebelled a long time. It was hard for me to raise a thousand dollars, together with the interest due from the time the mortgage was foreclosed; and it was like taking a portion of life to be obliged to abstract so much money from my gains, and give to a man who had no legal claim upon me. I groaned and mourned over it in secret, and tried to pray; but that mortgage came right between my prayer and God, and heaven looked dark and frowning through it. At last I could not resist the appeals of conscience any longer, and I went again to the minister. I told him my trouble, and asked him what I should do.

"There is a simple test," said he. "Do you love your neighbor as yourself? If you do you will be just to him, if it takes from you the last dollar you have in the world."

"That was a terrible sentence. I went out staggering from it, as if I had received a blow. 'O God,' I said, 'how can I be a Christian?' But I had help beyond myself, otherwise I could never have ended the struggle. I knelt before God and solemnly vowed for his sake, for the sake of his pardon and love, I would not only do justly to the poor man I had wronged, but would give up, if need be, all that I had in the world, so that I might find peace in him. A strange, soothing influence came

over my soul, and a voice seemed to say, 'Though you lose all you have, God and Christ and the blessing of a heart pure and at peace, shall be left you—the best and only true source of happiness in life.' And in the solemn night-time, after I gave up the struggle, that comfort seemed to me so great and precious that I was willing, if it would only stay with me, to accept poverty, and go into the world poor and despised, hugging that priceless blessing to my heart. The next day I was as light as if I had wings. Nothing could keep me from going to Isaac Dorr with a couple of hundred dollars in my pocket and a note for the remainder of what I owed him.

"Well," said the narrator, with tears running down his cheeks, "I only wish that every person here could have seen the Dorr family when I visited them and made known my errand. Poor Isaac had grown discouraged, and had just made up his mind to quit his wife and children and go to California. His children were crying and his wife was in an extremity of distress and despair. She received me a great deal better than I anticipated; I had acted according to law, she said, and Isaac, careless and improvident, was greatly to blame.

"Yes," said Isaac, with the firmness of a man, "it was a savage game you played me, but I was a fool ever to get into debt as I did, and then fancy that any man would not take advantage when the law permits it. I am ruined in consequence, and here you see this woman and babes—"

"The poor fellow broke down as he looked at them, and then cried like a child.

"Isaac," said I, as soon as I could speak, "I have come to show you that a man can be honest even when the law doesn't compel him to be. I want to do right because God commands it, and I have come to tell you that you need not leave your wife and babies yet, unless you prefer to."

"Prefer to go off into a strange country, and leave them here to suffer," he cried, and caught the children in his arms, and wrung his wife's hand, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

"Then I counted out the money I had brought, and explained what I intended to do, and gave him the note; and such surprise and happiness I never saw. They would have kissed my feet if I would have let them. It seemed as if heaven were opened then and there—and it was opened in my heart, with such a flood of light and joy as I had never experienced or thought possible before.

"My friends," added the captain, his once hard voice now almost as mellow as a woman's, his cheeks still moist with tears, "I have been constrained to make this confession; I thank you for listening to it. The minister tells me a man may be a church member and not a Christian. I mean to be a Christian first, and if I fail—"

He could proceed no further, but sat down with an emotion more effective than any words—*The Watchword*.

As there are Scriptures which do not disclose their beauty to us until we have withdrawn from the noisy world and closed the blinds, so there are Scriptures which are meaningless to us until we have mingled with the world's throng. It puzzles the shut-in saint to read of people who "call evil good and good evil," but on the street the libertine is pointed out as a "good fellow," strong drink is pronounced the "good gift of God," and the dissolute character just from a debauch is said to have had "a good time." And the cry of all the free-thinkers in the land is that the organized church is the greatest evil that afflicts the earth.—*Christian Witness*.

SOME FACTS.

Facts are said to be obstinate things. They can not be changed or altered. Whatever is cannot be otherwise. Whatever has taken place cannot be changed. This is the foundation of all history. People sometimes say, "We deny the fact." A most ridiculous assertion. A fact cannot be denied. It may be denied that certain alleged facts are real facts, but no one can deny a fact. There are some facts in the religious world that it does no good to ignore. And certainly they ought to be fixed in the minds of the people and emphasized. No good results from their suppression, but immense harm.

1. It is a fact that the ordinary religious service does not arouse and awaken hardened sinners as formerly. Many are attempting to excuse this by various explanations. It must be remembered that God convicts sinners. No human instrumentality can do this of itself. God will not convict and convert people just to bring them into the same experience of the great number of professed Christians of to-day. It would be of no use. For the great mass do not pretend to live without committing sin, and a large number of them have no testimony at all, while a good many more talk only of "crooked paths." We can see a good reason why there is so little old-time conviction.

2. It is a fact that in many places there is a different method of getting into the church. The old-fashioned method of crying to God for mercy; of confessing sin and making restitution; of struggling with unbelief until the victory comes; of waiting until the reception of the witness of the spirit has been superseded in many places by the signing of cards, or invitation to the front seat just to get the names, with baptism and admission into the church a little later. One of our bishops told us a while ago that he looked on at one of these so called great revivals, and that any one of any character could have signed the cards.

3. It is a fact that the greatest objection to religion to-day is in the lives of those that profess to have it. We do not say in the lives of all who have it, but profession that comes from those who do not have it is the great hinderance to the gospel to-day. There is no gainsaying this fact. What does it amount to if we get any more to swell the numbers? An unconverted man inside the church is on the road to hell just as truly as if he were outside.

From these facts we conclude that there is a great work on hand to-day in getting the church saved. If we cannot get them into an experience of salvation there is little use in asking others to be like them. This is the reason for the pushing of holiness, to get the church justified and sanctified. At the risk of being called pessimistic we propose to state the apparent facts. Salvation is too radical and grand an experience to be surrendered to a worldly religion and worldly religionists. We must maintain at any cost the fact that God has a salvation that men may have and be conscious of it. We must stand up for Bible religion even if a backslidden ecclesiasticism cry out and stigmatize it. When has a formal religion ever done anything else except to ignore facts and fail to discern the signs of the times?—*Christian Witness*.

UPLIFT.

When'er a noble deed is wrought,
When'er is spoke a noble thought,
Our hearts, in glad surprise,
To higher levels rise,
The tidal wave of deeper souls
Into our inmost being rolls,
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.