

Missionary Correspondence.

CHAPTER V.

Rev. H. C. Sanders, M. D.

(Continued.)

A Prodigal.

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."

There is a remedy for luke warmness and backsliding. My mother had found it; and now, since Pastor Kinney had returned from Douglas Camp Meeting, endued with power on high, others of those walking "in the light," were led into the blessing that "cleanseth from all sin." But, unfortunately, I was not among them. After about a year of victorious Christian life and service I drifted into a state of luke warmness, and, finally ceased to be an overcomer. "It is more honorable to give up one's profession," I argued, "than to live on this way." Perhaps Satan acted as my adviser, transformed into an angel of light. How stupid of me and blind, to so weakly yield when I had proven God's keeping power, and was not ignorant of the enemy's devices. But blindness always accompanies luke warmness. So to be "honorable" and "consistent" I cast away my hope in Christ.

Then followed the darkest period of my life. Remorse and despair haunted me daily. "What good was I in the world? God had chosen me to bear His name among the heathen; and here I was an open backslider, whose life was a reproach upon the name of Christ." Thus conscience lashed me until the old vain thought, "O, that I had never been born!" again appeared before me as a mocking spectre.

I have always deeply regretted these backslidings—there were two. They occurred at the time when a boy is forming habits that are likely to cling through life. And to have the evil one helping to mould one's character is indeed deplorable. I will refrain from dwelling upon the details of those sad days. The Holy Spirit strove with me continually, giving frequent glimpses of light and suggestions of hope.

After nearly a year of wretchedness, feeding upon "husks" with never any peace or lasting joy, I resolved to "arise and go to my Father. I did not seek an easy cheap way of getting back into the family of God, but was willing to pay the full price of unconditional surrender. Our "craft" was in Yarmouth for only a day or two. The Salvation Army, I knew, held services every evening. I would attend and get right with God that very night. The moment their invitation was given I went out to their "penitent form" and fell on my knees. To do this was extremely crossing, but when one's mind is fully made up the battle is really won. The speaker of the evening may have thought my coming out a result of his address—this thought occurred to my mind at the time. If so, his mistake illustrates how the credit of results in Christian work is often misplaced.

As soon as I had reached my knees and gotten on with my confession to God about as the boy in Luke XV., the old time peace and joy came flooding my soul like a mighty tidal wave. I arose and testified to that audience of strangers that the good Father had just welcomed a prodigal son.

The next morning we were off to the fishing grounds. But here I should pause to give

a glimpse into the occupation I was following. At the age of twelve I began as "cook" for a crew of six fishermen. Our vessel was a twelve-ton shallop, capable of taking salt and bait for a week's stay on the fishing shoals. For my services I had all the fish I caught, while the others gave half of theirs to pay running expenses and remunerate the owners. That first summer I earned twenty dollars a month, which pleased me much. The sport of catching fish with hook and line I found fully as fascinating as I had anticipated. There were not only the ordinary fish, cod, haddock, pollock and many other varieties, but often some one would hook a lively and valuable halibut. There were several exciting shark captures, as we carried a harpoon. Often we saw whales, porpoises and seals, to say nothing of the schools of mackerel, herring, squid and a thousand and one sights, all holding a great charm for me. But there was a great drawback; I was sea sick. All told me that this would pass away after a while, but it never did. Saturday nights I would walk up home feeling that I had had enough of the sea but by Monday morning I would be as fierce as ever to return to the fishing grounds.

The following winter father had a twelve-ton shallop built, the "Minnie C.," and, of course, I wanted to go in her. My sea sickness, however, did not leave me. So long as the weather was fine I was not bothered, but whenever the sea became rough I was certain to be sick. I recall one week when the weather had been stormy continually. I found myself able to walk only a few yards without resting. But a few days ashore put me all right. Thus it continued for several summers until I became more than "sick of the sea." Father then permitted me to remain at home and attend school. I had become interested in my studies and proposed to try for teacher's license.

My first and second times of wanderings from God both occurred during these summers of fishing. The fishermen say that no one can live religion and follow the sea, but this was no excuse for me, as God is able to keep His own under any circumstances. But as a backslider I found the unpleasant side of my life as a fisherman doubly aggravated.

My second wandering was not so easily healed. Already I had twice failed to hold out in living the Christian life, and was thoroughly discouraged. Then when I did begin to pray and try to get back to God, I found a new difficulty. God had given me great light and now, it seemed to me, He was too grieved to listen to my prayer. I feared that I had sinned away my day of grace. Many times I prayed but without apparent result. The heavens were as brass, my prayers would not ascend. "O, could I but know that God really would hear me once more!" I often said to myself, "how careful I would be henceforth." After a prolonged struggle this torture ended, and I saw that Satan had been blinding my eyes, while all the time the faithful Holy Spirit was striving to lead me back to God. When I was finally convinced that the great goodness and longsuffering of God reached even my case, faith was spontaneous, and the joy of conscious salvation was again mine in fullness. Thanks be to God, this was my last prodigal experience.

Not long after this it was my privilege to attend a series of meetings where a splendid teacher, Dr. George D. Watson explained the

higher Christian life. The conditions of consecration and faith I tried to meet. My same old trouble of unbelief held me for a time. I was kneeling as a seeker at the altar, trying to believe, when I overheard the doctor say to one at his side, "Be willing that God shall make you feel willing." This met my need. I ceased to look at my feelings and trusted God to attend to them. My will I placed on His side and claimed deliverance from my besetting sins. God honored faith and made me "free indeed."

Henceforth, though I had trials, the inward "bent to backsliding" was gone, praise God; and now I grew in grace as never before. Of this wonderful experience I wish to speak more fully in another chapter.

(To be continued.)

Paulpietersburg, Natal, May 29.

Dear Highway:—

How I wish the readers of your paper could visit our mission station; attend the Sunday services; see the natives as they come here day by day to sell grain, wood, etc.; and then accompany us to call on them, and see their home life in the kraals. All would be so very strange and interesting to you. What is now so common place with us as not to excite even our interest would cause you to wonder and ask many questions.

At our meetings yesterday, I tried to put myself in your place and observe the things that would have especially attracted your notice as being unlike what is customary at home. To begin with our excuse for a church building is but a small, delapidated, native-built hut, with mud floor, crumbling walls of sun dried brick, thatch roof, permeated with earth deposited by the destructive and everywhere present white ant.

The congregation is rather late in gathering, due to the fact that they are slow in preparing breakfast. Then again, their clock, the sun, is slow in this, our fall. It does not now rise until 6.45 while at Christmas we see it before 5 o'clock. When enough have arrived the church bell, (size of a small hat, and suspended from the branch of a mulberry tree back of the kitchen) is rung as notice that the service is about to begin. Two girls carry over the baby organ and I soon follow. There are to be two sessions, the first for prayer and testimony and the second for preaching, with twenty minutes recess between.

The men, boys and some of the female Christians occupy the benches while others of the women and girls prefer to sit on the mats spread on the floor as in their own homes. One thing I especially notice is that when the white missionary opens the meetings his organist is absent. He rises to the occasion, however, by playing one part only, showing that his musical education has been neglected in his youth. But as his audience do not understand his lack he does not mind. He is very thankful to be thus able to lead and control the singing that would otherwise run wild. Prayers are offered, a hymn sung, a lesson read, more singing and the meeting thrown open for testimony, after a few brief remarks.

"Such strange expressions," you will say, "in their prayers." For one is saying, "Lord, we bow before thee on our dirty knees and elbows. We are unworthy to open our little mouths before thee." They are such a people to copy expressions from one another. It is thus they learn to pray. On they pray with their borrowed eloquence, occasionally weav-