

ON RESTITUTION.

(By Captain Ball)

"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 that I had gotten 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? 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 a 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 reward hereafter. Then he said:

"Captain Ball, 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 lies in our 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. Every man has his weak point, and I suppose the lancet must be applied there first. That question was like a sharp scathing 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 dreadfully 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 knew 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, 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 dollars to boot. So I honestly think 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. 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, will be like a millstone 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. I went away, but 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 to wash my hands before I sat 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 besides Peter. I tried to say no, but my conscience wouldn't let me. I was discouraged. It was, indeed, so much harder being a Christian than I supposed, that I regretted going to talk with the minister at all. 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 everybody does—as church members themselves do when they can."

"What everybody does is no rule for you and me," said the minister. "It is to be Christians in the fullest sense—not simply church members." 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 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 bargain with me. So I concluded I would serve the Deacon as he probably would 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 may be 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 a while; but there was the note. There was no proof that it had ever been paid, and finally he took out his pocket-book, 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, and told him that, on reflection, I was convinced that he was right and I was wrong about the first 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. I tried to satisfy my conscience that it was. But I was afraid to go back to the minister, he has such a way of stirring up the conscience and finding mud at the bottom when we flatter ourselves that because it is not in sight, there is no impurity there. And I knew that 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 gotten away his farm, when he had no suspicion but I would give him time to redeem it. By that means I had gotten into my possession property worth two thousand dollars, for which I did not actually pay, and for which Isaac Door never actually realized more than half that amount. But the proceeding was 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 injustice to him, and to all others whom you have wronged.'

"Against the decree of my 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. I groaned and mourned over it in secret, and tried to pray; but the mortgage came right between my prayer and God, and heaven looked dark and frowning through it. At last 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. 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 I would give up, if needs 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

(Continued on Page Seven)