

SALVATION ILLUSTRATED.

"Did not God leave all men to perish in a state of sin and misery?" asked a Bible-class teacher.

"O dear!" said Edward, "was there ever so hard a question?"

"The question is easy enough. It's the answer that's hard," said Crawford.

"Well, answer it then!" replied the same boy. "There are no less than three things that puzzle me."

"What are they?" asked Crawford.

"First, why should God elect some, and leave others? Second, why should he do it from eternity, and not at any time? And, thirdly, why should he do it out of his mere good pleasure, without any reason for it? I am sure I can't choose things without having some reason for it! Mere good pleasure."

The boys were sitting together in a kind of frame in the garden, which was covered over with grape vines, and were now to finish the lessons of the day by getting their answer in the catechism. They saw Mary, as she passed the window, and said:

"Mary, won't you send out Mr. Fox here to help us?"

"I send out Mr. Fox?" said Mary. "Pray what power have I to order him out to you?"

"O, we don't know that—only we know that he will do any thing you ask him to do. We heard him say so to you this morning?"

"Nonsense!" said Mary.

"Well, if you won't send him, won't you ask him to please to come out?"

"That sounds more like it," said Mary.

After a while, Mr. Fox came out into the garden, apparently very reluctantly, either because he dreaded the catechism, or else because he found the company of the young ladies quite interesting in the house.

The boys stated their difficulties but not very clearly.

"Let us take one thing at a time," said Mr. Fox. "What is the first difficulty?"

"The doctrine of election," said Crawford.

"Well, what of it?"

"That God should elect some to everlasting life, and leave others to perish," said Crawford. "It seems wrong."

"You make me think of Joe Hunt," said Mr. Fox.

One beautiful moonlight evening, Joe Hunt and Samuel Stearns agreed that they would get over into my friend Mr. Napier's garden, and steal his peaches. So, about ten o'clock they got over the fence, very carefully and still. But Mr. Napier was walking in the shade of the house in a piazza, and saw them. When they had shaken one tree, and got their pockets filled, he went toward them. They both ran, and he ran after them. By and by, Sam Stearns tripped, and fell, while Hunt escaped. So Mr. Napier seized Sam; and the boy struggled and tore and tried to get away, but my friend was a strong man, and so held him fast. Nay, he led him back to the house and spoke kindly to him. He was very unwilling at first to tell his name, or go into the room where there was a light; but he did go in, and then he told Mr. Napier how he was a poor, fatherless boy, how he had been led into temptation, and how he was sorry for his faults, and promised that he would never be guilty again—in short, he appeared so penitent, that Mr. Napier not only forgave him, but became his friend. He sent him to school and watched over him, and he became a good and useful man. But Joe Hunt grew worse and worse, till at last he was sent to the State's prison. But he always quarrelled with the election made by Mr. Napier. Though he ran away with all his might and kept away, and associated only with the wicked, yet he always stood to it, that if Mr. Napier had only caught him, held him tight, and talked to him faithfully, he should have been good, and become a good man! He always insisted upon it, that it was this partiality of Mr. Napier that ruined him! Just so men feel and talk about God. Like Joe, they break over on forbidden ground. In God takes hold of them, they struggle to get away, as Sam did. And if they do get away—choose to get away from God, and choose to be left, and then complain that God has done them injustice by not choosing them! Had Joe any right to complain, or charge his subsequent wickedness upon Mr. Napier?"

"I think not," said Edward.

"Well, what next," said Mr. Fox.

"Why, that God should choose men from eternity," said Crawford.

"When could he choose them, if he chose them at all?"

"When they repent and become good," replied Edgar.

"But suppose from eternity God knew who would repent, and when they would repent, and every thing, just as fully as after they had done this; then how could he help choosing them from eternity? What matter is it when God makes up his mind to do what he does since he knows every thing that will or can take place? Are we through with your difficulties?"

"One more," said Edward. The answer says God (out of his mere good pleasure) elected some to everlasting life. I don't see how it would be right for him to save some men, and leave others to perish without any reason for it."

"Nor I. But who says it would?"

"Is not to do any thing out of his mere good pleasure, the same thing as to do it without any reason?"

"By no means. Where did you get that young peach tree which you planted in the garden?"

"I got it in Mr. Atwood's nursery," said Edward. "He told me that I might dig up any one that I chose in the whole row."

"Very well; did you dig up the largest or the straightest of them all?"

"No. There were many larger and straighter," said Edward.

"Well, you had some particular reason for taking the one you did. Perhaps you can remember the reason. Try and see. I don't want you to tell it to me. But can you remember it?"

"Yes, I can; and I thought it a good reason."

"Very likely it was a good reason. Have you ever told any body why you chose that particular tree?"

"No," said Edward.

"Well, then, suppose I should say that you had your choice of a long row of trees, and out of your own pleasure you chose that tree; that is, you never told the reasons; would that be saying that you had no reasons?"

"No, I think not."

"So I think. And when we say that God did any thing out of his mere good pleasure, we mean that he has not told us the reason why he did it. But we do not mean that he has no reasons. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Now, let us talk a little more about that peach tree. You remember that you told me last year, that you made a bargain with it, that if it did not bear fruit that was good, you would cut it down, and that it did not bear good fruit, and yet you did not cut it down, as you said you would. Do you remember telling me so?"

"I do," said Edward. "But I made a new bargain with my tree."

"Will you please to tell us what it was?"

"Why, I went over to Mr. Camp's and got some buds of grafted fruit, and put in five, and then told the tree that if it would cherish the new buds and cause them to grow and bear fruit, then I would not cut it down, but would take care of it. This I called my new bargain."

"Very well; that is just what I wanted. Your peach tree illustrates an important truth. If it had borne good fruit without budding, you would have kept your first agreement. But as its fruits were worthless, you got your buds, and thus brought it into a state of bearing good fruit. Just so God has done for the human race. He told Adam, that if he would live holy and not sin, and bring forth the fruits of holiness, he should live in his garden and be blessed forever. But as Adam brought forth only the fruit of sin—and so does every one who has sprung from him—he has provided a new way—made a new bargain—and by a Redeemer has brought them into a state of salvation. And as it is the bud which you put into your tree that produces good fruit, so it is the grace which God puts into the heart of man that brings forth the fruits of holiness in him. Thus God brings men into a state of salvation by a Redeemer. Have I answered all your enquiries?"

The boys were silent for a few moments. At length Crawford said—

"After all, I cannot see why God chooses some to everlasting life, and leaves others."

"Nor can I," said Mr. Fox. "But we know he does. He chose Paul, and left Judas to his own way. Nor can you see why Edward should be lame, and unable to get about except with his little crutches, while you and I have sound feet and legs. God does not tell us why he does this or that, but we know that he has good reason for every thing he does."

"How do we know that?" said Crawford.

"Because we know that He is good, and wise, and powerful; and such a being cannot do any thing without having the best reason for it."

"Shall I ever know why I am lame?" said the little lame boy.

"Certainly, if you are a child of God, he will hereafter explain it to you, and to your entire satisfaction. But supposing you had been born with sound limbs; and then you had broken your bones yourself because you did not want to be beholden to God for sound limbs, could you then blame God, if he let you be a cripple all your days?"—Rev. John Todd, D. D.

Doctrinal Preaching.

Dr. Cox, in his sermon on the death and character of Dr. Erskine Mason, makes the following characteristic reference to him as a doctrinal preacher:

Dr. Mason was distinguished for the theology of his sermons. He would not, did not preach, as some of popular renown in modern days, about religion, and about philosophy, and about politics, and about our civic affairs, and national functionaries, with amusing illustrations of—nothing; like the ever-varying visions and revelations of the kaleidoscope, held towards the light of heaven, and turning by caprice, amusing the superficial, and charged only with some shining and pretty pebbles of the earth. He preached theology; not its dry bones, nor its dead body; but its living glories, its doctrines, its duties, its symmetries, its realities, its hopes, its experiences, and its useful forms. And hence his preaching was so masterly, so enlightening, so lucid, so convincing, and so awful to the disobedient. The excuses of the sinner stood no chance before his powerful and devout argumentation. He drove them as chaff or stubble before the devouring flame. In offering salvation to sinners, he never darkened, or periled, or sophisticated the singularity of God. The offer in his ministrations, was no quibble, no hypothesis, no fiction. It was the offer *bona fide* not of man, but of God; and the sinner could reject it only against reason, only at his peril, only as a spiritual suicide. He never mistook in religion the *credenda* for the *agenda*, or made the things of faith antagonistic to the things of action, or stupidly confused them, and then called it a holy ministry, or in any way thought it a small thing whether God was vindicated, in these relations glorious to the eyes of men, as being equally sincere as he is also wise and holy: as never offering a salvation that has no existence, or provision that was never made, or a good supreme which he did not desire, all things considered, that the sinner should accept to life everlasting. These things of glory, at which so many stumble, where learning is so often at fault in its own technical contractedness, Dr. Mason well understood, and illustrated, with reason's triumph, and conviction's testimony, and Scripture's uncorrupted sanction. He understood the subject in its revealed relations. He studied it not in vain, and God illuminated his docile mind. He never inculcated contradictions, and then disposed of them by an economical act of faith. He understood the scriptural order of the Divine purposes, and their place infinitely glorious in the system. He consequently preached a harmonious gospel; believing, with the apostolic theologian, the beloved John, that *no lie is of the truth*. Hence the clarity of his preaching, and the effect it produced. Hence he never blundered in his orthodoxy, "making night hideous" with preposterous definitions or scholastic and purblind theories. He never mistook an article of faith for a rule of action; or inverted the relations of the footstool and the throne; or made our ignorance of who the elect are, the reason of God's offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel. That offer he saw based certainly and practically in the all-sufficiency of the atonement of Christ; and with no obstacle to prevent a man from accepting his great salvation, but what himself makes, by his voluntary neglect, or his infidel presumption, or his spontaneous preference for sin. Thus he always shone superior and masterly. There was substance in his sermons. Christianity was demonstrated, God was glorified, and no man could intelligently attend on his ministrations, and sincerely follow their guidance, without improvement to everlasting life. He made his hearers feel the value of the Bible as a revelation from God. He knew how to vindicate its nature, its claims, its divine inspiration, its proper use, its promulgation in the world, its canonical

authority, its wonderful history, and its true interpretation. I add, he was not only intellectual, but hearty, tender, sincere in his theologizing. He believed and therefore spoke, and without all that miserable weakness that multiplies its professions, protrudes its experiences, and parades its tears, that it may receive honor from men—of which he was scrupulously clear, and utterly averse to the least approach to it, there was an indirect and a pervading evidence of his heart in it, that all might feel and own, even if they could less explain the reason of it; *in doctrine showing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that could not be condemned, that he that was of a contrary part might be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.*

Across the River.

About six years ago, says a clergyman of New York city, I was travelling on the borders of the Hudson, and on the most beautiful portion of that noble stream, where its waters seem to rest against the Highlands of the Fishkill, and form the Newburg Bay. I was riding on the western shore, dotted with elegant country-seats, and so elevated as to command a fine view of the opposite county of Dutchess. Passing a substantial mansion, I observed carriages standing around the entrance, and a hearse, that plainly indicated the occasion of the gathering. It was something more than curiosity; it was the dictate of natural sympathy, that induced me to stop and mingle with the multitude.

It was easy to learn from the first whom I addressed, that a young man, the son of parents now advanced in life, was to be buried.

The clergyman in attendance was just closing his remarks when I stopped at the door, and after a short but eloquent pause in the services—for silence is always eloquent in the house of mourning—the afflicted father rose, and overcoming the emotion with which he struggled, spoke a few words to the friends that surrounded him. Said he, "A few months ago, one of my sons removed to the other side of the river, and resides on the shore in view of the spot where we are assembled. And now I find that my thoughts are over there far more frequently than they were before. I have long had friends there whom I loved, and I had an interest in the people, but I had no son there; but since that child has been a resident beyond the river, my heart is there often, and I love to be there. So it has been with me during the few days that have passed since this other son crossed the river of death, and, as I trust, has entered heaven. My thoughts are often there now. True, I had friends there before—a father there—but I had no child. Now I have an interest in heaven such as I never felt till one of my children went there to live!"—*Douglas's Power of Illustration.*

Conscience.

What pitiful things are power, rhetoric, or riches, when they would terrify, dissuade, or buy off conscience from pronouncing sentence according to the merit of a man's actions?

When conscience complains, cries out, or recoils, let a man descend into himself with a suspicion that all is not right within; for surely that the hue and cry was not raised up on him for nothing.

It is most certain that no height of honour or affluence of fortune can keep a man from being miserable, or indeed contemptible, when an enraged conscience shall fly at him, and take him by the throat; so it is also certain that no temporal adversities can cut off from those inward, secret, invisible supplies of comfort which conscience shall pour in upon distressed innocence in spite and defiance of all worldly calamities.—*South.*

Consoling Idea of Death.

"I congratulate you and myself," wrote John Foster to a friend, "that life is passing fast away. What a superlatively grand and consoling idea is that of death!—Without this radiant idea, this delightful morning star, indicating that the luminary of eternity is going to rise, life would to my view darken into midnight melancholy. O! the expectation of living *here*, and living *thus*, always, would be indeed a prospect of overwhelming despair. But thanks to that decree that dooms us to die—thanks to that gospel which opens the vision of an endless life, and thanks above all, to that Saviour friend who has promised to conduct all the faithful through the sacred trance of death into scenes of everlasting delight."