

Family Circle.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

PART I.

"And he spake a parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."

"Which of these two coins would you think most precious, Anna?" said Mrs. Fairley, placing before her little girl what appeared like two pieces of money.

"Oh, this bright shining sovereign, to be sure! the other looks dull and old, as if it had been taken from the dust-hole."

"Now take them up in your hands; you know that gold is a heavy metal—weigh them, and then tell me which you think the more precious."

"How very light this bright one is! I do not think that is a sovereign at all."

"It is not a sovereign; it is not made of gold; a little thin gilding alone gives it so bright an appearance."

"And the other one, mamma?"

"The other is an old gold coin, not now used as money, but valuable notwithstanding, because it is really gold. Do you remember anything of which these things remind you, my Anna?"

Anna thought for a moment;—she was a clever child, and her mother had accustomed her to reflect.

"They remind me that some people appear good, and are not really so, while others may be better than we think them."

"Yes, even as we read in the beautiful parable of the self-righteous Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee doubtless deceived others, he also deceived himself; he believed himself to be holy, and little thought how he appeared in the pure eyes of his Maker! Heaven preserve you, my child, from self-righteousness and pride, and teach you to know your own heart!"

Anna said nothing in reply; but, if the truth must be told, she thought her mother's caution very unnecessary as far as regarded herself.

That my readers may judge how far it was so, I will give a short account of the next Sunday passed by the little girl; and as we are rather writing about what she was, than what she did, I must let you into the secret of her thoughts as well as of her actions.

No one could look neater than Anna as she stood ready to accompany her mother to divine service in one of the churches in London. Her hair nicely brushed, her look quiet and sedate, just what might best become a child upon the Lord's day. No one knew that she thought that she appeared very nice, and that her mind was a little running upon her new habits.

As she walked towards the church, she passed near to a poor girl clothed in rags, bare-footed and dirty, who was standing with a basket of oranges to sell.

"What a wicked little creature that must be!" exclaimed Anna; "nothing could ever make me break the Fourth Commandment in such a dreadful manner!"

"My Anna, let us pray that we be not led into such temptation," replied Mrs. Fairley; then, as she passed by the fruit-seller, she said softly to her, "What shall I do to get a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The girl looked sadly at the lady, and her thin fingers grasped more tightly the handle of her basket, as she reflected on the words just spoken to her.

"To lose the soul! Oh, that is a terrible thought. I remember that text, and where it comes from. Oh, if the lady only knew my trials! I stayed at home and sold nothing last Sunday, because I feared to do wrong. I went hungry to bed, and my little brother cried himself to sleep. What can I do! Oh! what can I do! God help me, a miserable sinner!"

At present we will follow the steps of Anna. After entering the church and taking her usual place, she appeared very devoutly engaged in prayer, while all the time the thought of her heart was, "How could my mother speak a word to that wicked girl! I wonder why the police have not ordered to take such people to prison!"

Anna had never known what it was to want one meal! Her sins were of a different kind. Riches and poverty have each their peculiar temptations (Prov. xxv. 6, 9).

I promised that I would let you into the secret of Anna's thoughts, but I have not space to tell you a quarter of what passed through her mind during the two hours that she remained in church. I should be ashamed also to put such trifling down; and started indeed would the little Pharisee have been could she have seen a record of them before her! There was certainly very little that was at all like prayers, though she seemed to repeat earnestly every petition for pardon, for mercy and for grace. She had little idea that she required any of these blessings,—such people as the orange girl might be miserable sinners,—but for herself, her mind was quite at ease.

So Anna noticed the carving on the pulpit, and the shape of the windows; observed the fashion of the bonnets in front of her; wondered why the clergyman read so slowly; wished that the service were not so long; and left church at last, feeling that she had performed a great duty, and that whoever might wander from the straight path to heaven, she, at least, was upon the direct road!

Dinner and an amusing Sunday-book occupied Anna until it was time to prepare for the second service. She attended to the prayers, this time still less than the first, for she was tired as well as indifferent. Many a plan for the business and amusement of the week did Anna devise while the good clergyman was earnestly trying to lead sinners to the God whom they had offended!

And yet, could it be believed! when walking home with a friend, Anna presumed to find some faults in the preacher, and to express her sorrow that she had not heard "dear Mr. Haynes, who always, she felt, did her so much good!" She made some observations, also, which she thought clever and solemn, upon hearing of the sudden death of a neighbour whom she believed to have been worldly and gay; she drew a contrast in her mind between his character and her own, very decidedly to her own advantage; and parted from her companion with a comfortable feeling that she must certainly stand high in the opinion of her friend as a girl of singular piety.

Whose voice was so loud and full in the evening hymns as Anna's? She made sweet melody upon earth, but not such melody as is loved in heaven. The holy words upon her lips were not what engaged her attention,—she was admiring the sound of her own fine voice, and feeling sure that others must admire it also.

Anna retired to rest that Sabbath evening rather glad, in her heart, that the solemn day was over, though she would not, for the world have said so. She was pleased with herself for the way in which she had observed it; she never doubted that her conduct had been acceptable to the Almighty; and she rather considered herself as deserving of reward, than in any way requiring forgiveness. Also for the blindness of sinners who think God that they are not as other men are!

Have I among my readers one thus blind, one possessing the spirit of the Pharisee? Let him search his heart, his thoughts, and his motives, and honestly examine his life to see if his religion is the gilding of the gold!

And the publican, standing afar off, said, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."—*Lucas xvi. 14.*

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" These were the words which sounded in the ears of Anna.

At length the door opened and the congregation began to pour out. With what scorn some looked, and others with what pity, upon the miserable Sabbath-breaker, as they thought her! Patiently Esther watched till at length she perceived the old gentleman to whom the purse belonged. Timidly she approached him; she could not catch his eyes—he had no attention to give to such an object. She ventured very gently to touch his arm; he started, and, looking angrily at her basket asked her if she were not ashamed of such godless traffic upon the Lord's day. Silently Esther held up the purse; it was her only reply, but it was enough. Too much surprised to speak, the gentleman took the purse, walked a few paces, and examined its contents; then hastily returned and asked the orange-girl her name, and that of the place where she lived. Esther modestly replied, the old gentleman nodded his head, put his purse in his pocket, and walked away. "Without a word of praise—without a farthing of reward—the poor girl returned to her home; and through that long day she and her young brother had nothing with which to satisfy their hunger but a little of the fruit which conscience forbade them to sell!

But this was the last day that Esther was ever to know want; the God in whom she trusted had not forsaken her. The next morning the old gentleman called at her lodging, inquired into her case, promised to put her in the way of earning an honest livelihood, and kept that promise faithfully. Her rags were exchanged for good warm clothes—her wretched lodging for one respectable and clean. The next Sunday, when worshippers sought the house of prayer, Esther no longer stood trembling without, but joined, heart and soul, in the song of praise—"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

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the poor orange-girl, as she stood, barefooted and ragged near a church, with her basket, tempted by hunger to sin, but with her conscience awakened, even by this short sentence from a passer-by. As she paused, irresolute and sad, a little bird flew within a few feet of her, and carried away a crumb from a spot where a beggar had taken his early breakfast. This was a very trifling occurrence, but the little winged creature preached a sermon to the heart of the poor girl. It brought back to her mind a text heard long ago, during the time she had attended a Sunday school:—"Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them; are ye not much better than they?"

"God will take care of me, if I only love and trust him!" murmured poor Esther. "Oh, how sinful I was ever to doubt it! May the Lord forgive me for intending to do what is so wrong, and have pity upon me, and upon my poor little brother. I will go home at once, and pray for pardon for my sin."

So Esther turned from the place with a broken and contrite heart, and took her way towards her wretched lodging. She had to go through a narrow street, in which there was a small chapel; but the bells were silent, because the service had begun, and there was scarcely a passenger in sight. Just as Esther was passing the door of the chapel, a gentleman, walking rapidly, for he knew that he was late, brushed past her and entered the place. He drew a hymn-book from his pocket, and at the moment that he entered the door, Esther fancied that she heard a slight chinking sound, turned her head, and saw a bright crimson purse lying on the door-step of the chapel. Trembling she laid her hand upon it, paused, and glanced around; there was no earthly eye to behold her. Here was temptation in another form. The Evil One seemed to whisper, "This is an answer to your prayer; the Lord has sent you help; neither you nor your brother shall starve, and as for the money, the rich man will not miss it!" But poor Esther had not heard in vain the words of the Lord, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" She resisted the temptation with the sword of the Spirit—the good seed had been received into a honest, faithful heart!

Esther, barefooted and miserably clad, dared not venture into the chapel to restore the purse. She determined to remain and watch until its owner should come out, and give it back without even looking at its contents. Oh! how many times was she tempted, during the long two hours, to go away with her unlawful prize! Once a policeman ordered her to move on in a stern tone of command, which made the poor girl tremble. She took up her basket, passed round the corner of the street, then watched her opportunity, and returned to her place. She heard a faint sound of singing from the chapel; she thought it very beautiful, and listened with a mixture of pleasure and fear. "Oh, while holy, happy beings are singing in heaven," murmured Esther, "shall I be shut out, as I am here!" The tears filled her eyes, but she looked up towards the sky: "There is room there even for a poor sinful creature like me!"

At length the door opened and the congregation began to pour out. With what scorn some looked, and others with what pity, upon the miserable Sabbath-breaker, as they thought her! Patiently Esther watched till at length she perceived the old gentleman to whom the purse belonged. Timidly she approached him; she could not catch his eyes—he had no attention to give to such an object. She ventured very gently to touch his arm; he started, and, looking angrily at her basket asked her if she were not ashamed of such godless traffic upon the Lord's day. Silently Esther held up the purse; it was her only reply, but it was enough. Too much surprised to speak, the gentleman took the purse, walked a few paces, and examined its contents; then hastily returned and asked the orange-girl her name, and that of the place where she lived. Esther modestly replied, the old gentleman nodded his head, put his purse in his pocket, and walked away. "Without a word of praise—without a farthing of reward—the poor girl returned to her home; and through that long day she and her young brother had nothing with which to satisfy their hunger but a little of the fruit which conscience forbade them to sell!

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