

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning, William noticed that his friend's eyes were red with weeping, and his manner showed that he was distressed. His post on the play-ground that day was vacant, and he was more cast down and reserved than usual.

Three or four days after this, when the six o'clock bell rang at evening, William and his friend Charles might have been seen passing down the hall and entering a recitation room, where, once in each week, those of the students who were so inclined met for prayer. These meetings were usually well attended, and as they continued but one hour, they were always to edification, which, as an old writer says, "ceaseth where weariness begins."

It was the first time Charles had attended the meeting, and as he took his seat beside William, and all became still, one of the teachers who conducted it arose and read the hymn—

"I love to steal awhile away
From every cumb'ring care,
And spend the hours of setting day
In humble, grateful prayer."

Then they all joined in singing it.

Those meetings were always pleasant to William. He made it a point to be there at the time. But to Charles it seemed strange and solemn. He was somewhat ashamed to be seen going thither, but after he was in, he was glad that he had come.

When the hymn was ended, the teacher read a few verses from the Bible, and then prayed. He had noticed Charles's appearance during the day, and seeing him in the prayer-meeting, he easily divined the cause, and earnestly and affectionately presented his case at the throne of grace. The last hymn being sung, the bell rang for evening studies; and the teacher, Mr. Morgan, kindly took Charles by the hand, as he lingered with William behind the others, and expressed his deep interest in his state of mind. The tears were in his eyes as he bade Mr. Morgan good night, and leaning on William's arm, they went to their accustomed place in the forest to pray.

My young friend, have you ever been as Charles was? If so, you can understand how he felt, much better than I can tell you. How bitter were his lamentations, how distressing his fears, how perplexing his doubts! Not knowing whither to flee, yet unable to stand still, fearful of moving lest he should go wrong, yet conscious of his danger as he was, he knew not what to do.

“How long have you felt seriously the danger of your present condition?” inquired William.

“Oh, two or three weeks. Ever since you and I were talking together when we were walking out that night, after the Bible class.”

“Why did you not tell me then?” said William.

“I do not know. I wanted to tell you, but then I was ashamed to speak about it.”

“How do you feel now? Have you any desire to be a Christian?”

“Oh yes, but I am so great a sinner, I know not what to do.”

“Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt

glorify me," said William. "This is our heavenly Father's invitation."

"Oh, but he is not *my* heavenly Father, for the Bible says that he is angry with the wicked every day."

"But he is willing to be our Father, for he has said, 'I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' And the blessed Saviour says, 'Ask, and it shall be given you—seek, and ye shall find—knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'"

"Now," said William, kneeling down with Charles, "let us ask Him."

When he had concluded, he asked Charles to pray, which he did with fervency, and apparent humility and penitence. As they rose from their knees, Charles exclaimed, with audible sobs and deep emotion, "Oh the depth of the riches of the love of Christ!"

"Do you indeed feel Him to be precious to you?"

"Oh, I trust I do. I trust he has forgiven me, though I am unworthy of his love. I have sinned against him so much."

On their walk home, they felt that

Christ was in their company, and "their hearts burned within them by the way."

How sweetly did Charles recline upon his pillow that night—how did his affections go forth to his Redeemer. As he lay upon his bed and looked out upon the serene sky, he thought with the Psalmist of Israel, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Then he thought of all his past life—of his sins—his neglect and forgetfulness of God—and then, as he considered how kind and compassionate God had been in sparing his life, and leading him, as he hoped, to repentance, tears of gratitude and love streamed from his eyes. Then he thought of his friend William, how he had talked to him, how he had prayed for him, and how he had been led to think upon his own course by observing his bright example; and he lifted his heart in prayer for God's blessing upon him. These thoughts all crowded upon his mind. Then he thought of home, of his dear mother and brothers,

and sisters far away, and thought how glad she and they would be to hear that he hoped he was a Christian. For they know that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about those that fear Him," and they feel the preciousness of that inspired declaration, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

William's feelings were not unlike his friend's. He thought of the exceeding great mercy of God towards Charles, in leading him to repentance; and prayed earnestly that he might be kept through faith unto eternal life. How joyful did he feel, as he lay down to sleep! How grateful that God had heard his prayer, and forgiven Charles, and adopted him, as he humbly trusted, into his own family! How sweetly did he fall asleep, for he had a foretaste of that blessedness of which the prophet Daniel speaks: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

But Charles soon found that there are thorns in the narrow way as well as

flowers; that none go to heaven on downy beds of ease; that persecution, in some shape or other, is prepared for all who will live godly upon the earth. Though naturally reserved and modest, and consequently averse to making any display, he nevertheless openly avowed the change in his feelings, and his determination to live to the honour of his Redeemer. He was now a constant attendant upon the weekly prayer meeting, and upon the Sabbath exercises in the sanctuary, nor did he neglect the more private duties of reading, meditation and prayer. In all these, he sought the counsel of his teachers and Christian friends. His conversation, though more grave and serious, was yet cheerful and pleasant.

And why should it not be? If the Christian cannot be cheerful when he thinks of his relations and prospects—of the great and glorious God, as his Father; of the bright and blissful heaven as his home; of all the great and good as his associates for ever, and that all things—yes, ALL THINGS—no matter what they are, nor how painful to be borne, whether it be joy or sorrow, riches or poverty,

sickness or health, life or death, all things shall work together for his good; if, when he thinks of all this, he cannot be cheerful, who can be?

My young friends, have you imagined that a long face, a sorrowful voice, and a desponding tone, are elements of religion? If so, you are mistaken. They have not any necessary connection with it, except that sorrow steals over us when we think of our sins, or of those who are without religion, but certainly not when we think of our own hopes and prospects. When we consider that, perhaps, some one of our own children, or brothers, or sisters, or friends, are going down to everlasting death, to be the prey of the worm that never dies, and to endure the fire that never shall be quenched, to dwell in the blackness of darkness for ever; then indeed, it is not to be wondered at, if we should be exceeding sorrowful, but it is, that such will not share the blessedness we expect to enjoy. But, as Christians, we have not only reason to be happy and rejoice, but we are even commanded to "rejoice in the Lord always."

There were some lads at Wilton, who

seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in persecuting the "young convert," as they called Charles. Doubtless they were forced to respect, if not to envy him, although they affected much contempt. But Charles remembered that it was said, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution;" and he remembered the text too, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," but like Moses, "he had respect unto the recompense of reward."

"Come, Seymour," said Hopkins to Charles, one evening, as he, with several others, were coming out from tea, "let's have a game of ball."

"No, I thank you," replied Charles, "not this evening."

"Why, you don't think there is any harm in a game of ball, do you?" inquired Hopkins, with a malicious wink to his companions.

"No, but I am engaged to go to the prayer-meeting, and it commences soon," replied Charles, modestly.

"Oh! ah! the prayer-meeting, eh!" said Hopkins.

"He has got to be mighty good all at once," said another.

"I wonder how long it will last," said a third. "I forgot though,—he is one of the converts. I suppose there won't be any more ball-playing after this."

"I hate your hypocrites," said Hopkins, with a sneer.

Charles felt the ridicule, but made no reply.

Hopkins, failing to draw any answer from him, turned to the rest, and with a contemptuous tone said, "he presumed there were others there not too good to take a game;" and invited them to do so.

The bell rang, Charles entered the prayer-meeting, and prayed for his persecutors, and Hopkins and his associates enjoyed the game of ball. Who was the happier of the two when the bell again rang for study hours, I leave the reader to judge.

