

A NOBLE YOUTH;

OR,

WILLIAM MASON.

BY THE AUTHOR
OF "THE USEFUL CHRISTIAN."



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EASTER-MONDAY was a day to which I used always to look forward, when a boy, with peculiar interest; because, in the morning, I was taken, with the Sunday-school in which my father, the late Thomas Cranfield, was a teacher, to Surrey chapel, where the Rev. Rowland Hill was accus-

tomed to address the boys of the various schools in and about Southwark, and to present each with a hymn. In the afternoon of the day, my father used generally to take a number of the scholars for a pleasant walk, and treat them with biscuits, and curds and whey.

On one occasion, I recollect, the afternoon was unusually cold and wet, and I was greatly disappointed, because my father had promised to take us to St. Paul's cathedral, to see the monuments there.

Notwithstanding the rain, the children began to assemble in our parlor long before the time appointed. Some amused themselves by reading the hymn they had received in the morning, while I, and a few others, seated ourselves at the window, to watch the progress of the weather; where, with downcast looks, and half-muttered expressions of regret, we lamented our unlooked-for disappointment.

Our musings, however, were interrupted by the well-known voice of my father, who cried out, as he entered the room, in his good-humored way, "Here is nice weather for the ducks, my lads; no St. Paul's to-day." "Do you not think it will clear up, sir?" asked several of us at the same time. "No, I do not," he answered, as he took his seat in his old arm-chair; "so you had bet-

ter endeavor to amuse yourselves in some other way."

"There goes William Mason," at length exclaimed one, "posting along as fast as he is able: poor fellow, he seems to have had a long walk."

"He does, indeed," said I, endeavoring to assume a cheerful countenance, "for he looks as wet as though he had been dragged through a fishpond. Do look at him, father."

"Ah, that is a noble youth," observed my father, as he just peeped through the corner of the window. "A noble youth, did you say?" I replied; "I am sure, father, he does not look very noble, for he is splashed up to the very neck."

"A tree is judged by its fruit," answered my father, "not by its leaves; and William's character must be estimated by his conduct, not by the present appearance of his clothes. If you knew as much of him as I do, I think you too would say he was a noble youth; and if the remainder of his life is spent as the last ten years have been, he will as much deserve a monument to his memory as some whose names and deeds are recorded in the noble edifice of St. Paul's: aye, even much more deserve it."

"What then," I asked, with some astonishment, "has William ever fought the French?" "No," said my father, "but he has fought the good fight

of faith; and if he has not gained a victory over the enemies of his country, he has gained many a one over the enemies of his soul."

"Father," said I, "I have often heard you say that William Mason was a very good boy, when in your class; I wish you would tell us something more about him."

"Oh do, do, sir," exclaimed a dozen voices at once; and with that we all left the table, and tried to get as close as we could to his chair—quite forgetful of the weather, and of the things that were passing out of doors.

"I do not," said my father, "like to say too much in any person's praise while he is living, lest he should hear of it again, and be led to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. For our hearts are very deceitful, and all of us are too apt to be puffed up by the praise of our fellow-creatures. There are a few circumstances, however, in William's history, which perhaps it might be profitable to you if I were to mention; and while I am telling you of them, do you pray that the Lord will enable each of you to go and do likewise.

"William Mason was a little boy when he first came to our Sunday-school; vicious in his habits, and dirty in his appearance. As he grew older he became a great annoyance to the more orderly

scholars, and so troublesome, that the teachers seriously thought of dismissing him.

"One day, however, as William was amusing himself and some of his school-fellows, these words from his teacher arrested his attention: 'Remember, you are not too young to die; and though you may trifle now with the offers of mercy, yet be assured, that for these things God will bring you into judgment.' William went home serious and thoughtful, and during the whole of the week, and for some time after, these words continually sounded in his ears. They were applied to his heart by the Holy Spirit, and he became alarmed lest he should die in his sins, and be for ever banished from the presence of an offended God; and now, for the first time in his life, he began to pray."

"What, sir," said an intelligent little boy, who had been listening with great attention to what my father had been saying, "did he never say his prayers before? then I think he must have been very wicked."

"He was in the habit of repeating the Lord's prayer every night," replied my father, "but he never attended to what he was saying, and was always glad when it was over; so that, while he drew nigh to God with his lips, his heart was far from him. This, the Bible tells us, is not prayer;

and so does the hymn which, I believe, you have all learned :

“ We never can be said to pray,
From what our lips are saying ;
But when our hearts and lips unite,
Then God beholds us praying.”

“ William now became a praying boy, and searched the Scriptures daily, and was as remarkable for his dutiful and attentive behavior at the school, as he was before for his trifling and disorderly conduct.

“ As soon as William, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, was made acquainted with the value of his own soul, he began to be concerned for his parents, and frequently, when alone, would pray earnestly to God for their conversion. But William did not rest contented with merely praying for his parents ; he remembered that his teachers had often told him that God usually worked by means, he therefore took frequent opportunities of talking to them about Jesus ; and when at school he paid great attention to what was said by his teachers, in order that he might carry home as much as possible to his father and mother.

“ William continued this practice for a long time without any appearance of success : his mother remained still a stranger to God and the happiness which flows from reconciliation with him ;

and his father continued his usual custom of spending his evenings at the public-house. But William had read in the Bible that he must not be 'weary in well-doing;' so he persevered, and at length his prayers were answered, and his efforts crowned with success.

"It happened that one night his mother went out to nurse a poor woman who was very ill, and William was left alone. Every thing was still and quiet, so he thought that this would be a good opportunity for reading and prayer. He therefore took down his Bible, and for some time sat meditating on God's blessed word, and then knelt down to pray. While he was thus engaged his father returned home—for having had that night a quartel with the landlord of the public-house, he left much sooner than he was accustomed to do. The street door being opened, he entered, and was ascending the stairs when the voice of his son arrested his attention. He stood still for a moment wondering who William was talking to. He then crept up stairs very softly, and looking through the key-hole of the door, saw the dear boy upon his knees, and distinctly heard him say, 'O Lord, have mercy upon my poor father; make him a sober man; give him a new heart, and make him fit for heaven.' The poor man listened with attention till his son had concluded, and then entering the

room, clasped him in his arms, and declared that he would never enter a public-house again.

"From this time William's father was an altered man. He forsook the haunts of sin, and attended the house of God on the Sabbath. His example was followed by his wife; and now William and his father and mother are found walking together as heirs of eternal life.

"When he was about thirteen years of age, he was sent to work at a blacksmith's, where there were several wicked men; and though he was obliged to work hard all the week at the forge, yet he always contrived to learn his catechism and scripture, besides several hymns, and a number of verses in the Bible; and was never known to make that idle excuse which we so often hear at the school, 'I had no time to learn.'"

"Why, father," said I, "he must have had a pretty long memory to have learned all that, and worked the whole of the week besides."

"I do not know," said my father, "that there was any thing extraordinary in his memory, but I do know that perseverance will accomplish great things. I once asked him how it was that he contrived to learn so much, and he told me that it was his practice to keep his Bible on the bellows; so that when he was engaged in blowing with them, at the same time he employed himself in

learning portions of Scripture. This, however, was not done without much opposition from the men, who used to ridicule him, call him a Methodist, and throw the water which was kept at the forge upon his Bible, in order to put him in a passion. Sometimes they would offer him money to say bad words, and to fight other boys; but he nobly resisted every temptation, and bore their insults with admirable patience. Do you not think," said my father, turning to me, "that William acted nobly in this?"

"I once offered a new waistcoat to any boy in my class who would learn the 119th Psalm by the following Sabbath. All, except William, were ready enough to make the promise; but he seemed to take time to consider first. He sat for a few minutes, turning over the leaves of his Bible, and then said, 'I think, sir, I can learn it; I will try, at any rate: thirty verses each day will do it; and I think I may promise to do that.' Having set himself his daily task, he took good care always to perform it before he went to bed. It is true, he met with many difficulties, and once or twice he was tempted to give up the undertaking; but he said to himself, I have given my promise, and I must perform it; so he persevered, and on the following Sabbath repeated it, much to my satisfaction; while the other boys were unable to say

even a fourth part of the psalm. My dear boys, always be mindful of your promises. Consider well before you make one; and having once given your word, let no frivolous excuse prevent you from fulfilling it. The boy that thus keeps his promise in defiance of difficulties, possesses a noble spirit; and such a character is William Mason.

"After he had been a few weeks at the blacksmith's, he obtained a situation as reading and errand-boy at a printer's. On one occasion, he was ordered to tell a customer that his master was not at home, when he knew that he was in his parlor; but William nobly refused to tell a lie, which made his master so angry, that he threatened to turn him away. Neither threats nor persuasions, however, could induce him to commit so great a sin; he continued resolute, and another was induced to perform the degrading office. Now, do not you think that William was a noble youth?"

"Yes, that I do," said one; "So do I," said another; and I asked, "But did his master dismiss him?"

"Not then," replied my father, "but he did a short time afterwards; for, one week his master had more work to do than he was able to finish, and William was ordered to attend at the office on the Sabbath. Now to break the Sabbath, by working on that holy day, was to him a crime so awful,

that he told his master at once, he would sooner lose his situation than do it. This answer, though delivered in a respectful manner, so provoked his master, that he ordered him never to enter his place again.

“William came to me at the school the next morning, and, with tears, told me all that had taken place. I tried to comfort him, by telling him that the Lord would never forsake those who were called to suffer for his sake, and that put their trust in him; and so it happened: for in a very short time, he secured a much more comfortable and profitable situation, and there he remains now. In consequence of his upright and dutiful behavior, his master has several times raised his wages; so that he now earns double the money that he did at first, and is enabled to support both his afflicted parents, which to him is a source of much gratification.”

“Are his parents, then, unable to work?” asked one of the boys. “They are both quite disabled from doing any thing for their support,” replied my father, “in consequence of severe injuries which they received through the falling-in of their house. William came to me, the morning after the accident, and told me all about it.

“William and his parents were fast asleep in bed when it happened. The inhabitants, too, had all retired to rest, and the watchman was ge-

ing his rounds, crying, 'Past two o'clock, and a cloudy morning,' when the neighbors were aroused from their slumbers by the terrible crash. William had prayed to God to protect him before he went to bed, and the Lord answered his prayer; for, though he slept in the top room, to the astonishment of every one, he was taken out of the ruins almost unhurt. A man who slept in the next room was killed; and William's parents were so injured that they were taken to the hospital, where they continued for several weeks; and I am afraid they will never be fit for labor again.

"William now works hard to support his parents, and he does it cheerfully, because he considers it his greatest honor to assist those in the time of their sorrow, who watched over, and took care of him in his childhood. Besides, he knows that by so doing, he is pleasing God, who has commanded him to honor his father and his mother. That, my dear boys, is a noble youth, who strives as much as is in his power to make his parents happy, by obeying their commands, by administering to their necessities, and by doing every thing that he can to comfort them under their trials; and such a character is William Mason.

"It is delightful to see William leave his dwelling in the morning, or enter it after the labors of the day. His parents welcome him home with the

most tender affection, while he inquires after their welfare, and particularly if he can do any thing for them; for he is never too tired to wait upon them. Nor does he think it beneath him, now he is grown up, to serve them: it is the delight of his heart to receive the affectionate and approving smiles of his parents; therefore he obeys their wishes now, just the same as when he was a little boy, and dependent on them for support.

“After supper, William takes the Bible, and reads a chapter, for his parents are no scholars; and then they all kneel down, while he prays for God’s blessing and protection, and gives him thanks for the instruction afforded him in the Sunday-school, which has been the means of making him so happy, and caused him to be such a blessing to his dear parents.

“Such,” continued my father, “is the conduct of this noble youth—noble, not by birth or parentage, but for his upright and Christian conduct—noble, not on account of the perishable riches of time, but of those treasures which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and which the world can neither give nor take away—noble, not through the fading honors of this world, but those which shall bloom and blossom in the paradise above, when this world, with all its grandeur and magnificence, shall have passed away.

“And now, my dear boys, I hope you will all strive to imitate the example of this noble youth. Under all circumstances, be determined to obey God rather than man. Never deceive your fellow-creatures. Keep holy the Sabbath-day. Honor and obey your parents: and do all from a principle of love to God; and then, if I am proud of any thing, it will be of having such noble-minded scholars.”

My father now lies beneath the green grass in the graveyard, and near him lies William Mason, his favorite and noble-minded scholar. And though no monument marks their resting-place, yet He, before whose eyes all things are naked and open, beholds the spot where they lie, and will watch over their remains until the last trump shall sound, and they shall rise to life and immortality.

“God our Redeemer lives,
And always from the skies,
Looks down, and watches all our dust,
’Till he shall bid it rise.”

My dear young reader, come in your early days to Christ. His blood alone can cleanse you from your sins; his Spirit alone can sanctify you, and make you holy. Happy will you be, if you live a life of faith on the Son of God—happy now, and for evermore.