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OWEN, Robert Dale (Autobiography (1))

"*She.* No! I am a lady gay,
It is very well known I may
Have men of renown
In country or town;
So, Roger, without delay,
Court Bridget or Sue,
Kate, Nancy, or Prue;
Their loves will soon be won;
But don't you dare
To speak me fair
As if I were
At my last prayer
To marry a farmer's son.

"*He.* My father has riches in store,
Two hundred a year, and more;
Besides sheep and cows,
Carts, harrows, and ploughs;
His age is above threescore;
And when he does die,
Then merrily I
Shall have what he has won.
Both land and kine,
All shall be thine,
If thou 'lt incline
And wilt be mine,
And marry a farmer's son.

"*She.* A fig for your cattle and corn!
Your proffered love I scorn.
'T is known very well
My name it is Nell,
And you 're but a bumpkin born.

He. Well, since it is so,
Away I will go,
And I hope no harm is done.
Farewell! Adieu!
I hope to woo
As good as you
And win her too,
Though I 'm but a farmer's son.

"*She.* Be not in such haste, quoth she,
Perhaps we may still agree;
For, man, I protest
I was but in jest:
Come, prythee, sit down by me:
For thou art the man
That verily can
Win me, if e'er I 'm won.
Therefore I shall
Be at your call,
To marry a farmer's son."

J. V. Blake.

BEYOND.

I HAVE a friend, I cannot tell just where,
For out of sight and hearing he has gone;
Yet now, as once, I breathe for him a prayer,
Although his name is carved upon a stone.

O blessed habit of the lips and heart!
Not to be broken by the might of Death.
A soul beyond seems how less far apart,
If daily named to God with fervid breath.

If one doth rest in God, we well may think
He overhears the prayer we pray for him:
Our Father, let us keep the sacred link;
The hand of Prayer Love's holy lamp doth trim.

Were the dear dead once heedless of God's will,
Needing our prayer that he might be forgiven;
Against all creeds, that prayer uprises still,
With the dim trust of pardon and of heaven.

Charlotte F. Bates.

BOY-LIFE IN A SCOTTISH COUNTRY-SEAT.

A CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

I MUST have been, from my earliest years, a very self-willed youngster, I recollect my mother telling me of some of her troubles, dating from the time when I was still unable to walk; the old story of the baby screaming persistently, if refused anything he had set his little heart on. Very gentle though she was, the doctrine of innate depravity, in which she had been bred, urged her to slap me into quiet. But my father — an advocate of system, and an undoubting believer in his favorite tenet that "man's character is formed for him, not by him" — stoutly opposed that. Yet the screams, whenever my mother objected to having her lace collar torn. or a teacup, of some old china-set, snatched from the table and flung to the floor, remained a stubborn reality which no theory could get over; and it seriously disturbed my father as well as the rest of the house. Something must be done.

"When the child screams from temper, my dear Caroline" (my father thought my mother's middle name more romantic than the plain Ann; but I think I should have called her *Annie*), — "when the child screams, set him in the middle of the nursery floor, and be sure you don't take him up till he stops crying."

"But, my dear, he 'll go on crying by the hour."

"Then let him cry."

"It may hurt his little lungs, and perhaps throw him into spasms."

"I think not. At all events it will hurt him more if he grows up an ungovernable boy. Man is the creature of circumstances."

My mother, who had been a dutiful daughter, was also an obedient wife, and she had a great respect for my father's judgment — in temporal matters. So the next time I insisted on trying innocent experiments on teacup or collar, I was carried off to the nursery and set down, screaming lustily, on mid-floor.

My mother must have suffered dreadfully for the next hour; but soon after that the fury of disappointment wore itself out, and I dropped asleep on the pillow behind me.

This punishment had to be repeated five or six times. My mother was beginning to despair when she found, one day, to her great relief, that baby could be crossed in his wishes and made to give up, with just a little fretting. After a time even the fretting ceased. The infant culprit had learned a great lesson in life, — submission to the inevitable.

This was all very well; but the temper remained, and culminated, six or seven years after the nursery experiments, in a fit of indignant rage, after this wise.

Braxfield House was situated about half-way between the village of New Lanark and the ancient shire-town of Lanark. The latter is famed in Scottish history; and on "the Moor" near to it *wappin-schaws* used to be held in the olden time. There was no post-office in the village, and one of the supplementary workmen there, a certain James Dunn, an old spinner who had lost an arm by an accident in the mills, was our letter-carrier, — the bearer of a handsome leather bag with gay brass padlock, which gave him a sort of official dignity in the eyes of the rising generation; and by this time there were some three or four young vine-shoots growing up around the Owen family table.

If James Dunn had lost one arm, he made excellent use of the other; constructing bows and arrows and fifty other nice things, for our delectation,

and thus coming into distinguished favor. One day he gave me a clay pipe, showed me how to mix soap-water in due proportion, and then, for the first time in our lives, we children witnessed the marvellous rise, from the pipe-bowl, of the brightly variegated bubble; its slow, graceful ascent into upper air; and, alas! its sudden disappearance, at the very climax of our wonder. My delight was beyond all bounds; and so was my gratitude to the one-armed magician. I take credit for this last sentiment, in extenuation of the crime which was to follow.

We had in the house a sort of odd-job boy, who ran errands, helped occasionally in the stables, carried coals to the fires, and whose early-morning duty it was to clean the boots and shoes of the household. His parents had named him, at the fount, after the Macedonian conqueror; but their son, unlike King Philip's, suffered nicknaming, or at least contraction of his baptismal title into Sandy.

Sandy, according to my recollection of him, was the worst of bad boys. His chief pleasure seemed to consist in inventing modes of vexing and enraging us; and he was quite ingenious in his tricks of petty torture. Add to this that he was most unreasonably jealous of James Dunn's popularity; especially when we told him, as we often did, that we hated *him*.

One day my brother William, a year younger than myself, and I had been out blowing soap-bubbles ("all by ourselves," as we were wont to boast, in proof of our proficiency), and had returned triumphant. In the court-yard we met Sandy, to whom, forgetting, for the moment, by-gone squabbles, we joyfully related our exploits, and broke out into praises of the pipe-giver as the nicest man that ever was. That nettled the young scamp, and he began to abuse our well-beloved post-carrier as a "lazy loun that hadna' but yin arm, and could do naething with the tither but cowp letters into the post-office and mak up bairns' trashtrie."

This incensed me, and I suppose I must have made some bitter reply; whereupon Sandy snatched the richly prized pipe from my hand, deliberately broke off its stem close to the bowl, and threw the fragments into what we used to call the "shoe-hole"; that contemptuous appellation designating a small outhouse, hard by, where our tormentor discharged his duties as shoeblack.

Unwilling to be set down as telltales, we said not a word about this to father or mother. But when, an hour later, I burst into tears at the sight of James Dunn, I had to tell him our story. He made light of it, wisely remarking that there were more pipes in the world; and, shouldering his post-bag, went off to the "auld town." If my readers can look back far enough into their early years, they may imagine my joyful surprise when, on his return, he presented me with another pipe.

I took it up to an attic room of which I had the run when I wished to be alone; locked the door, with a vague feeling as if Sandy were at my heels; sat down and gazed on the regenerated treasure. The very ditto of the pipe I had tearfully mourned! brand new, just from the shop. But the delight its first sight had given me faded when I thought of the sacrifices that dear, good man had been making for my sake. It was so generous of him to give me the first pipe! I had no idea whatever of its money value; to me it was beyond price. Then here his generosity had been taxed a second time. Again he had been spending for me out of his wages, which I supposed must be small, since he had only one arm to work with. And who had been the cause of all this woful self-immolation? That vile, cruel, rascally Sandy! To him it was due that James Dunn had felt compelled to make a second purchase, — to the stinting, perhaps, of his poor wife and children! And — who could tell? — the same malignant ill-turn might be repeated again and again. Ah! then my indignation rose, till I could hear the heart-beats.

I remember distinctly that no plans

of revenge had arisen in my mind caused by the destruction of my first pipe, however enraged I was at the perpetrator of that outrage. It was only when I found one of my dearest friends thus plundered, on my account, that my wrath, roused to white heat, gave forth vapors of vengeance.

I brooded over the matter all day, so that I must needs plead guilty to malice aforethought. Toward evening my plans took shape; and, ere I slept, which was long after I went to bed, every detail had been arranged. My adversary was a large, stout, lubberly fellow, more than twice my age; and I had to make up in stratagem for my great inferiority in strength.

Next morning, before the nursery-maid awoke, I crept furtively from bed, dressed in silence, descended to the court-yard, and armed myself with a broom: not one of your light, modern, broom-corn affairs, but a downright heavy implement, with a stout handle and heavy wooden cross-head attached, set with bristles. It was as much as I could do to wield it.

Then I reconnoitred the enemy's camp. No Sandy yet in the "shoe-hole"! I went in, set the door ajar, and took post, with uplifted weapon, behind it.

I had long to wait, Sandy being late that morning; but my wrath only boiled the more hotly for the delay. At last there was a step, and the door moved. Down with all the might of concentrated rage came the broom — the hard end of the cross-piece foremost — on the devoted head that entered. The foe sank on the ground. I sprang forward — but what was this? The head I had struck had on a faultlessly white lace cap! It flashed on me in a moment. Not the abhorred Sandy, but our worthy housekeeper, Miss Wilson!

Miss Wilson was one of a class common in Great Britain, but rare in this country, — a notable, orderly, painstaking, neatly dressed maiden of thirty-five or forty summers; deeply read in all the mysteries of household-craft; but kindly withal, and much disposed to make pets of the children around her. With the exception of James Dunn, she was one of our greatest favorites. I am afraid one element in our affection for this good woman was of a selfish nature. She had obtained from my mother permission to have us all to tea with her every Sunday evening, on condition of a two thirds dilution with warm water, but without any sumptuary regulation as to the contingent of sugar.

Now, in that country and in those days, young folks, both gentle and simple, were restricted to very frugal fare. For breakfast, porridge * and milk; for supper, bread and milk only. At dinner we were helped once sparingly to animal food and once only to pie or pudding; but we had vegetables and oatmeal cake *ad libitum*. Scottish children under the age of fourteen were rarely allowed either tea or coffee; and such was the rule in our house. Till we were eight or ten years old we were not admitted to the evening meal in the parlor. Miss Wilson's tea-table furnished the only peep we had of the Chinese luxury.

Thus the Sunday evening in the housekeeper's parlor (for Miss Wilson had her own nicely appointed parlor between the kitchen and the servants' dining-hall) was something to which we looked eagerly forward. On that occasion we had toast as well as tea; and the banquet sometimes culminated with a well-filled plate of sugar-biscuit, a luxury doubly prized because its visits were rare as those of angels.

* It may or may not be necessary here to say that porridge is a sort of mush, or hasty-pudding, made by gradually dropping oatmeal into boiling water, seasoned with salt. The cake spoken of was composed of oatmeal and water, rolled out thin, and browned before the fire.

In the Scottish dialect oatmeal porridge is called *parritch*; and there is a story illustrating the ridiculous extent to which early promotion, even of mere children, in the British army is, or was, obtained by family influence; and marking also the customary breakfast-fare in the nursery. A gentleman, visiting a family of distinction in the Highlands and coming down stairs in the morning, heard a loud bawling. Meeting a servant, he asked him what was the matter. "O sir," said the man, "it 's naething but the Major, greetin' for his parritch."

These hebdomadal symposia gave rise, among us, to a peculiar definition of the first day of the week. We took this, not from the sermons we heard, or the catechism we learned, on that day, but from the delicacies on Miss Wilson's table, somewhat irreverently calling Sunday the *toast-biscuit-tea-day*. I am not certain whether this juvenile paraphase ever reached my mother's ears; for Miss Wilson was too discreet to retail the confidential jokes which we permitted ourselves in the privacy of her *petits soupers*.

Under the circumstances one may judge of my horror when I saw on whom the broom-head had fallen. The sight stunned me almost as much as my blow had stunned the poor woman who lay before me. I have a dim recollection of people, called in by my screams, raising Miss Wilson and helping her to her room; and then I remember nothing more till I found myself, many hours later, in the library; my mother standing by with her eyes red, and my father looking at me more in sorrow than in anger.

"Would n't you be very sorry, Robert," he said at last, "if you were blind?"

I assented, as well as my sobs would allow.

"Well, when a boy or man is in such a rage as you were, he is little better than blind, or half mad. He does n't stop to think, or to look at anything. You did n't know Miss Wilson from Sandy."

My conscience told me that was true. I had struck without waiting to look.

"You may be very thankful," my father went on, "that it was n't Sandy. You might have killed the boy."

I thought it would have been no great harm if I had, but I did n't say so.

"Are you sorry for what you have done?"

I said that I was very, *very* sorry that I had hurt Miss Wilson; and that I wanted to tell her so. My father rang the bell and sent to inquire how she was.

"I am going to take you to ask her pardon. But it 's of no use to be sorry, unless you do better. Remember this! *I have never struck you. You must never strike anybody.*"

It was true. I cannot call to mind that I ever, either before or since that time, received a blow from any human being; most thankful am I that I have been spared the knowledge of how one feels under such an insult. Nor, from that day forth, so far as I remember, did I ever myself give a blow in anger again.

The servant returned. "She has a sair head yet, sir; but she 's muckle better. She 's sittin' up in her chair, and would be fain to see the bairn." Then, in an undertone, looking at me: "It was a fell crunt,* yon. I didna think the bit callan could hit sae snell."

When I saw Miss Wilson in her arm-chair, with pale cheeks and bandaged head, I could not say a single word. She held out her arms; I flung mine round her neck, kissed her again and again, and then fell to crying, long and bitterly. The good soul's eyes were wet as she took me on her knee and soothed me. When my father offered to take me away, I clung to her so closely that she begged to have me stay.

I think the next half-hour, in her arms, had crowded into it more sincere repentance and more good resolves for the future than any other in my life. Then, at last, my sobs subsided, so that I could pour into her patient ear the whole story of my grievous wrongs: Sandy's unexampled wickedness in breaking the first pipe; James Dunn's unheard-of generosity in buying the second; the little chance I had if I did n't take the broom to such a big boy; and then —

"But, Miss Wilson," I said when I came to that point, "what made *you* come to the shoe-hole, and not Sandy?"

* *Crunt*, to be interpreted in English, must be paraphased. It means a blow on the head with a cudgel.

"I wanted to see if the boy was attending to his work."

I then told her I would love her as long as she lived, and that she must n't be angry with me; and when she had promised to love me too, we parted.

It only remains to be said, that about a month afterwards, Sandy was quietly dismissed. We all breathed more freely when he was gone.

If I deserved more punishment for this outbreak than my father's reproof and the sight of Miss Wilson's sufferings, I came very near receiving it, in a fatal shape, a few months afterwards.

The estate of Braxfield is beautifully situated on the banks of the Clyde. The house stands on a bit of undulating table-land, then set in blue-grass, containing some thirty or forty acres; and the slope thence to the river was covered with thick woods through which gravel-paths wound back and forth till they reached the Clyde, a quarter of a mile below the mills. What charming nutting we used to have there!

At low-water there was a foot-path, under the rocks, by which these woods could be reached from the village; and, of course, there was great temptation, on Sundays, for the young people — pairs of lovers especially — to encroach on this forbidden ground; to say nothing of the hazelnut temptation, when autumn came. Nothing could be more romantic and inviting.

Of course it would not have done to give two thousand people the range of the woods: so trespassing therein was strictly forbidden. Yet I remember, one Sunday afternoon when my father had taken me out to walk, seeing, through the underwood in a path below us and to which our road led, a lad and lass evidently so intent in conversation that they were not alive to anything else: if they had known who was near, they would have taken to flight at once. My father stopped and looked at them, calling to mind, I daresay, his own walks in the Green with Miss Ann Caroline. "They don't see us," he said to me; "let us turn back. If I meet them, I must order them off the place; and they have so few pleasures and so much work! It 's hard." So we took another path; and the lovers pursued their way, unconscious of the danger that had approached them.

Besides this wooded "brae" in front of the mansion, there was, on one side, a steep declivity into a deep, bushy dingle, with large, old trees interspersed, and, rising on the other side, a precipitous bank of similar character, on the summit of which was perched the house of our next neighbor. This could not be reached, by vehicle, without making a circuit of a mile and a half; but a slanting foot-path led, from our stable-yard, down into the glen, and a rough, scrambling way ascended thence the opposite bank, conducting the pedestrian, by a short cut, to the old town. This rude pass was known, far and near, by the euphonious name of *Gullietoodelum*.

All this afforded good cover for foxes; and one of these midnight prowlers had carried off certain fowls and ducks belonging to James Shaw, a burly farmer who tilled the arable portion of the Braxfield estate, and whose cottage we were wont to frequent, attracted by the excellent mashed potatoes, prepared with milk, with which Mrs. Shaw secretly treated us. They turned a penny by supplying our family, from time to time, with poultry; and now the "gudeman" took arms in defence of his live stock. Having loaded a fowling-piece heavily with slugs, he deposited it in a dark corner of the coach-house, which, with stables attached, stood on the edge of the wooded dingle where Reynard had been seen.

There, during a morning ramble, my brother William and I came upon the gun. It was a flint-lock, of course; for the days of percussion-caps were yet afar off. Having brought it out to the light, for inspection, my brother amused himself by pointing it at me and attempting to draw the trigger. I reminded him that our mother had for-

bidden us ever to point guns at one another.

"But it 's not loaded," remonstrated William.

"I know that," was my reply (though how I came to that hasty conclusion I am quite unable to explain), "I know it is n't loaded, but mamma said we were never to pretend to shoot one another, whether the gun was loaded or not."

Whereupon he submitted, and I further informed him that the flint of a gun could not be snapped without drawing back the cock, which I showed him how to do, having once snapped a gun before. With my aid he then hugged the stock of the weapon under his right arm, pointing the barrel in the air, and pulled the trigger; this time so effectually that the recoil threw him flat on his back.

He struggled to his feet and we looked at each other. Not a word was spoken. I seized the gun, flung it back into the coach-house, not quite certain whether that was the end of the explosion, and, by a common impulse, we both took to our heels, fled down the glen-path, nor stopped till at the foot of Gullietoodelum. There we paused to take breath.

"I do believe, Robert," my brother ejaculated at last, — "I do believe that gun was loaded!"

I had gradually been coming to the same conclusion; so I did not dispute the point. Slowly and silently we reascended from that dark glen to the upper world again, sadder and wiser boys.

I have often thought since how Young America would have laughed us to scorn as Molly-caudles, for our green ignorance, at seven or eight, touching fire-arms and their use. Half a year later, however, I obtained leave to go on a shooting expedition with a young man who had a salary from the New Lanark Company as surgeon of the village, and who attended the sick there gratuitously. We proceeded to a neighboring rookery where sportsmen were admitted on certain conditions. I carried a light fowling-piece, and was then and there initiated into the mysteries of loading and firing. Though at heart mortally afraid, I stood stoutly to my gun, and brought down two confiding young crows who were yet inexperienced in the wiles and murderous propensities of men and boys.

As we were returning home in the dusk I overheard a brief conversation, not intended for my ears, between the surgeon and a comrade of his who had accompanied us. They had been pleased, it seems, with the spirit I had shown; and the mention of my name attracted me.

"He 's a fine, manly boy, that," said the comrade.

"He 's a noble little fellow," rejoined the surgeon.

Most children, I think, accustomed to hear themselves commended, would have forgotten the words within twenty-four hours; but they sunk into my heart, and I could swear, to-day, that I have textually repeated them here. This wineglass full of praise intoxicated me; for I think it was the first I had ever tasted. My father's creed was that "man is not the proper subject of praise or blame"; being but what circumstances, acting on his original organization, make him. So his approval, when I deserved approval, was testified only by a pleased smile or a caress.

The words haunted me all the way home and for days afterwards. Their effect was similar to that sometimes produced during the excitement of such camp-meetings as I have witnessed in our Western forests. They woke in me what, in revival-language, is called "a change of heart." I solemnly resolved that I would *be* what these men had said I was.

Next morning, accordingly, I not only myself submitted, with exemplary forbearance, to the various matutinal inflictions of cold bathing, scrubbing, hair-combing, and the like, but I exhorted my younger brother and sisters to similar good conduct. The nursery-

maid was amazed, not knowing what to make of it; no doubt I had been rebellious enough in the past.

"What 's come over the bairn?" she exclaimed. "Where has he been? I think he must hae gotten religion." Then, looking at my sober face, she asked me, "Were you at the kirk yestreen, Robert?"

"No," said I, "I was shooting crows."

"Shootin' craws!" I remember to this day that look of blank perplexity. The girl was actually alarmed when she missed my wonted wilfulness. "It passes me," she said at last; "the callan must hae gane daft. He 's no the same bairn ava."

This fit of meekness lasted, in its extreme phase, so far as I remember, about ten days. Yet — strange if it seem — I think it left its impress on my character for years.

The powerful influence which seeming trifles exerted over my conduct in those days — now stirring to revenge, now prompting to reformation — may in part be traced to the recluse lives we led in that isolated country-seat; a seclusion the more complete because of the unquestioning obedience to the strictest rules (especially as to metes and bounds) in which we were trained. The Clyde, though the largest river in Scotland, was not, at its usual stage and where we were wont to bathe, over thirty or forty yards wide; and we were pretty good swimmers. The enterprise of any urchin, ten years old, in our own day and country, would undoubtedly have suggested the construction of a small raft on which to convey our clothes across, and then an exploration of the unknown regions beyond. But we were forbidden to trespass there; and it did not enter into our heads to break bounds.

There was a bridge over the river, but little more than a mile below our house; but, during the first decade, my mother was unwilling to trust us so far from home, and we had never crossed this bridge except in our carriage and on the turnpike road. I had passed my tenth birthday when my father told William and myself, one day, that he was going to take us a walk across the bridge and on the other side of the river. Our blissful anticipations of this remote expedition were enhanced by knowing that there was to be found, close to the bridge, a far-famed baker's shop, of which the *parleys* (that is, thin, crisp ginger-cakes) were celebrated all over the county; and when my mother put into our pockets sixpence apiece, to be there expended as we pleased, our joy was full.

But if, as regards pedestrian excursions, we were held under strict rule, in other matters we were free and privileged. We had the unrestricted range of my father's library, which was a pretty extensive one.

I have no recollection as to when and how I learned my letters. All I remember is that, at seven or eight years of age, I was an omnivorous reader. "Robinson Crusoe," pored over with implicit faith, made the first deep impression. Then, one after another in succession, came Miss Edgeworth's winning stories, — household words they were in our family. "Sandford and Merton" came next into favor; succeeded by "Thaddeus of Warsaw" and the "Arabian Nights." After these I devoured Miss Porter's "Scottish Chiefs"; not a doubt obtruding itself as to whether the gallant and romantic military gentleman — the courteous Knight of Ellerslie, whom the lady's pencil has depicted in rosy colors — was the veritable champion of Scotland, — the same hot-blooded and doughty warrior, sung by Blind Harry, who, while yet a stripling, stabbed, in a Scottish castle, the son of its governor, in requital of a few insulting words. My indignation, originally roused by nursery legends, was rekindled, and my national prejudices confirmed, by this more modern version of Monteith's treachery and his noble victim's cruel fate. These feelings were intensified during a visit to Cartland Crags (or *Craigs*, as we pro-

nounced the word), — a deep, narrow gulch a little way beyond the town of Lanark, walled by precipitous rocks some two hundred feet high, and forming the water-course of a small stream called the Mouse. From the bed of that stream we climbed thirty or forty feet up the face of the rocks to a deep cleft known to all Scotland as "Wallace's Cave," and to which, when in peril of his life, that sturdy chieftain was wont to retreat. No Fourth-of-July oration, no visit to Plymouth rock, ever produced, on young scion of Puritan, a deeper impression than did the sight of this narrow, secluded cell upon me, — its pavement worn by the feet of patriotic pilgrims. I think, if I had but been stirred by a Hamilcar of a father prompting me, I might have sworn, then and there, eternal enmity against the English. But, in my case, the paternal sentiment was, "Love to the whole human race"; so that, outgrowing hate-bearing prejudices in the genial atmosphere of home, I have reformed, and can say, as Webster said of himself on a well-known occasion, "I am very little like Hannibal"; having come to eschew strife of all kinds, and devoutly believing that "love is the fulfilling of the law."

My mother, a devout Presbyterian, though too gentle to be bigoted, was thoroughly imbued with the belief that the most orthodox form of Protestantism is essential to happiness, if not to virtue. Upon this conviction she acted with persistent conscientiousness. It colored her daily conduct. Was any one among us sick? She sat, hour after hour, by his bedside; and administered, by turns, temporal comforts and spiritual consolation. Had we lost a pious friend? His death was spoken of as a translation to a world of bliss. Did any of us ask for a pretty story? It was selected out of the Scriptural pages. We were told of the place above for good boys and girls, and of the fire below for the wicked; and when we asked who were good and who were wicked, we were taught that all boys and girls and men and women were wicked unless they believed, in the first place, that Jesus Christ was the only Son of God, and, in the second place, that nobody could escape from hell except by vicarious atonement through his death and sufferings. My mother added that all who believed that, and who read the Bible every morning, and said prayers every night, and went to church twice every Sunday, became good people, and would be saved and go to heaven; while all who disbelieved it were lost souls, who would be punished forever with the Devil and his angels.

My father, a Deist, or free-thinking Unitarian, was tender of my mother's religious sentiments, and did not, in those days, interfere with her instructions or seek to undermine our belief. I recollect, one day when he had been explaining to me how seeds produced plants and trees, that I asked him where the very, *very* first seeds came from, and that his answer did not go to shake my faith in the Mosaic account of the creation.

Thus left to orthodox teaching, I soon became an apt and zealous scholar; often prejudiced, I was never indifferent; still more often mistaken, I was sincere in my errors, and I always sought to act out what I believed.

Very peculiar was my state of mind in those early years. Breathing an orthodox atmosphere, I never doubted that it extended over the whole earth. I had just heard of pagans and Romanists and infidels; but I thought of all such dissenters from the creed I had learned as a handful of blinded wretches, to be met with in some small remote quarter of this vast world, — a world that bowed to Christ alone as its God and Saviour. To set up my own opinion against all the pious — that is, against all good men, or rather against all men except a few who were desperately wicked — was an acme of arrogance that did not once cross my thoughts.

My good mother — more amiable than logical — did not perceive the perilous insecurity of a creed so nar-

row in a character like that of her eldest son. In a chart given to me, in the year 1827, by Spurzheim, causality and conscientiousness are marked as predominant organs, and self-esteem as a large one. If that diagnostic may be trusted, the danger to my orthodoxy was the greater. The first doubts as to the religious belief of my infancy were suggested when I was about eleven years old.

By this time the New Lanark establishment had obtained considerable celebrity, and was frequented by visitors of some distinction. Among these a bishop of the Anglican Church, having brought a letter of introduction to my father, was invited to his table, and I sat next to him. During dinner conversation turned on the original depravity of man, which, to my utter astonishment, my father called in question; the bishop, of course, stoutly affirming it. I listened, with greedy ears, to the discussion; and, during a pause, I put in my word.

"Papa," said I, "I think you 'd find it a very difficult thing to make a bad heart a good one."

The bishop, amused and astonished to find so youthful an auxiliary, patted me, laughingly, on the back and said, "You 're in the right, my little fellow. God only can do that." Then he encouraged me to proceed, to the no small increase of my vanity and self-importance. My father, instead of checking me, replied patiently to my argument; and his replies left me much to think about.

Next day I had a lecture from my mother on the sin of self-sufficiency, and was told that little boys must listen, and not join in grown people's conversation. But this did not quiet me. When I pressed my mother closely about my father's opinions, she confessed, to my horror, her doubts whether he firmly believed that Christ was the Son of God.

I remember, to this day, the terrible shock this was to me, and the utter confusion of ideas that ensued. My state of mind was pitiable. I knew there were wicked unbelievers among the Hottentots and New-Zealanders whom I had read about; and my mother had once confessed to me that, even in England and Scotland, there were a few low, ignorant people who read the books of an infidel called Tom Paine: but my own father! — kind, indulgent to us all, and loved and respected by everybody, — was *he* wicked? was *he* as bad as the pagans? I took to watching his benevolent face; but he talked and smiled as usual. There was no cloven foot to be seen, nor any sinister inference to be drawn from his quiet, pleasant demeanor.

In fear and trembling I laid my perplexities before my mother. Excellent woman! I know well now in what a strait she must have found herself, between her creed as a Calvinist and her love as a wife. Somewhat at expense of conscience, perhaps, she compromised matters. Swayed by her great affection for my father, and doubtless also by her fears that the disclosure of his heresies might weaken the paternal authority, she sought to soften their enormity by declaring that, but for these, he was everything that was good and estimable. "Pray to God, my child," she would say, "that he will turn your dear father's heart from the error of his way and make him pious like your grandfather." Then, with tears in her eyes, "O, if he could only be converted, he would be everything my heart could desire; and when we die he would be in heaven with us all."

"If he could only be converted!" These words sank deep. "My father is too good a man," I said to myself, "to sin on purpose. Perhaps nobody ever explained holy things to him as my mother did to me. If I could only save his soul!"

The more I pondered upon this, the more it seemed possible, probable, at last unquestionable. I called to mind some texts my mother had read to us about the mouths of sucklings, and what they might do; also what Jesus Christ had said about little children as

being of the kingdom of Heaven. I did not, indeed, conceal from myself that my father was a wise and prudent man: I saw that men listened to him with respect and treated him, on all occasions, with consideration. But my mother, whose habit it was to read a chapter from the Bible to us every evening, happened, about that time, to select one from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Christ returns thanks to God that things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. It occurred to me that perhaps God had caused my mother to read that chapter for my especial encouragement.

Then again, I had great faith in the efficacy of prayer. Several years before, while we were staying, for a time, in my grandfather's town-house, I had been shooting with bow and arrow in the same garden where David Dale found that *honest* man. I had lost my best arrow, and sought for it a long time in vain. Then, instead of following Bassanio's plan, —

> "When I had lost one shaft,
> I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
> The self-same way, with more advised watch,
> To find the other forth," —

I dropped on my knees behind a gooseberry-bush and prayed to God that he would show me where my missing arrow was. Rising and turning round, lo! there it stood, deep sunk in the ground close to another bush. My mother, when I told her of this, had, indeed, expressed doubt as to the propriety of prayer for a thing so trifling; but I retained the conviction that God had answered my supplication: and every night, on my knees, I prayed, as fervently, I think, as any young creature ever did, that He would help me also to convert my father.

But, as commonly happens to propagandists, more selfish motives supervened, to enkindle my zeal. We learn from history that Louis XIV. was prompted to repeal that charter of religious freedom, the edict of Nantes, by the desire to save an abject soul, loaded down with the debaucheries of a lifetime, from perdition. And though the class of sins to which I was prone differed somewhat from those of the French monarch, they weighed heavily upon me, nevertheless. A hundred times my mother had told me that I was a miserable sinner; and conscience brought up before me many proofs of this.

My activity being great, and my spirits of a restless order, the breach of the fourth commandment was my besetting sin. Though I had successfully resisted a great temptation to play at foot-ball on Sundays, yet when James Dunn, one Saturday evening, brought me a new hoop of his own manufacture, I hid it in the woods, stole away in the afternoon of the next day, and "broke the Sabbath" by trundling it for an hour, stung with compunction the while. Then there was that conspiracy against Sandy, with its awful result! Add to this that I was terribly given to yawning in church, and that, on two different occasions, I had fallen sound asleep during evening prayers. Worse still, there was a romance (entitled "Anne of Brittany," I remember) in which, when I was summoned to bed one Saturday evening, I had left the heroine in a most interesting and perilous situation, and next morning, when my mother came quietly into the library to tell me it was time to prepare for church, so absorbed was I in Anne's imminent danger, that I was detected — *flagrante delicto* — in the very act of reading a novel on the Lord's day! Could there be a doubt as to my innate depravity? And was it strange that, while Louis sought salvation by coercing millions of Huguenots to flee or to embrace Catholicism, I should strive to have my father's redemption placed to my credit on that great book that was to be opened on the Day of Judgment?

But aside from religious convictions and the desire to atone for my sins urging me on, there was that organ of self-esteem, hereditary perhaps, the size of which in my brain the great phrenologist had detected. Under its influence I could not get away from

the resolve to convert my father. I say the resolve to *convert him*, not to *attempt his conversion;* for so I put it to myself, nothing doubting.

I don't think I had any clear conception what a mission is. Yet I had a vague idea that God had chosen me to be the instrument of my father's salvation, so that he might not be sent to hell when he died.

I was mightily pleased with myself when this idea suggested itself, and I set about preparing for the task before me. Summoning to my recollection all my mother's strongest arguments, I arranged them in the order in which I proposed to bring them forward. Then I imagined my father's replies; already anticipating my own triumph and my mother's joy, when I should have brought my father to confess his errors and repent. But I said not a word of my intentions to her or to any one. The joyful surprise was to be complete.

I recollect, to this day, the spot on which I commenced my long-projected undertaking. It was on a path which skirted, on the farther side, the lawn in front of our house and led to the garden. I could point out the very tree we were passing when — with some misgivings, now that it was to be put to the test — I sounded my father by first asking him what he thought about Jesus Christ. His reply was to the effect that I would do well to heed his teachings, especially those relating to charity and to our loving one another.

This was well enough, as far as it went; but it did not at all satisfy me. So, with some trepidation, I put the question direct, whether my father disbelieved that Christ was the Son of God?

He looked a little surprised and did not answer immediately. "Why do you ask that question, my son?" he said at last.

"Because I am sure —" I began eagerly.

"That he *is* God's Son?" asked my father, smiling.

"Yes, I am."

"Did you ever hear of the Mahometans?" said my father, while I had paused to collect my proofs.

I replied that I had heard of such a people who lived somewhere, far off.

"Do you know what their religion is?"

"No."

"They believe that Christ is not the Son of God, but that another person, called Mahomet, was God's chosen prophet."

"Do they not believe the Bible?" asked I, somewhat aghast.

"No. Mahomet wrote a book called the Koran; and Mahometans believe it to be the word of God. That book tells them that God sent Mahomet to preach the gospel to them, and to save their souls."

Wonders crowded fast upon me. A rival Bible and a rival Saviour! Could it be? I asked, "Are you *quite* sure this is true, papa?"

"Yes, my dear, I am quite sure."

"But I suppose there are very few Mahometans: not near — *near* so many of them as of Christians."

"Do you call Catholics Christians, Robert?"

"O no, papa. The Pope is Antichrist."

My father smiled. "Then by Christians you mean Protestants?"

"Yes."

"Well, there are many more Mahometans than Protestants in the world: about a hundred and forty million Mahometans, and less than a hundred million Protestants."

"I thought almost everybody believed in Christ, as mamma does."

"There are probably twelve hundred millions of people in the world. So, out of every twelve persons one only is a Protestant. Are you *quite* sure that the one is right and the eleven wrong?"

My creed, based on authority, was toppling. I had no answer ready. During the rest of the walk I remained almost silent, engrossed with new ideas, and replying chiefly in monosyllables when spoken to.

And so ended this notable scheme of mine for my father's conversion.

My mother had claimed too much. Over-zealous, she had not given her own opinions fair play. Even taking the most favorable view of the Calvinistic creed, still what she had taught me was prejudice only. For if looking to the etymology of that word, we interpret it to mean a judgment formed before examination, then must we regard as prejudices his opinions, however true, who has neglected to weigh them against their opposites, however false. Thus even a just prejudice is always vulnerable.

Had my mother been satisfied to teach me that the Old Testament was a most interesting and valuable contribution to ancient history, filled with important lessons ; had she encouraged me to compare the ethical and spiritual teachings of Christ with those of the Koran, or of Seneca, or Socrates, or Confucius (all of which were to be found in our library) ; and had she bid me observe how immeasurably superior they were in spirit and in civilizing tendency to all that had gone before, — she would, I think, have saved me from sundry extreme opinions that lasted through middle life.

But she was not content without setting up the Bible, as Caliph Omar did the Koran, not only as the infallible but also as the solitary source of all religious knowledge whatever. The days of Max Müller were not yet. My mother had no doubt heard of comparative anatomy, but never of comparative religion. Lowell's lines had not then been written :—

> " Each form of worship that hath swayed
> The life of man and given it to grasp
> The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
> Enfolds some germs of goodness and of right."

The immediate effect, however, of my mishap in the attempt to make a Calvinist of my father was good. My failure served as a practical lesson in humility. I listened and thought and doubted more than had been my wont, and I spoke less.

Nor did I give up the creed of my childhood without a long and painful struggle.

I daily searched the Scriptures as diligently, I think I may say, as any child of my age could be expected to do ; coming upon many seeming incongruities and contradictions, which were sad stumbling-blocks. The frequent discussions between my father and his visitors, to which I eagerly listened, still increased my doubts. After a time I lost faith in my mother's favorite doctrine of the infallible. The axe had been laid at the root of my orthodoxy.

For more than a year, however, I listened with exemplary patience — even with more attention, indeed, than formerly — to my mother's pious homilies, and was seldom deficient when called up to repeat my catechism-task. I did not say anything, during all that time, to betray my growing scepticism ; but neither did I, as I formerly had done, profess zeal for religion, or implicit faith in the Bible. I do not recollect ever to have deceived a human being on a matter of conscience ; and this I owe to my parents.

On one point the teachings of my father and mother strictly harmonized. My father sought to impress it upon me that I could never become a gentleman unless I spoke, on all occasions, the exact truth ; while my mother's teaching on that subject was that the Devil is the father of lies ; and that, if I told falsehoods, God would reckon me among the Devil's children. The organ of conscientiousness, if Spurzheim had made no mistake, may have aided these lessons. At all events, I grew up to regard a lie as of all sins the most heinous.

To this sentiment it was due that, in the end, my conscience sharply reproached me for a deceptive silence, and I determined to tell my mother that my faith was changed. Once or twice I had resolved to do so after our evening devotions ; but her sad face — for she had begun to surmise that all was not right — deterred me.

Finally I stated the facts, plainly and succinctly, in a letter which I intrusted, one evening just before going to bed, to an aunt who was staying with us.

Had I known the effect my missive was to produce, I do not think I should have sent it. My mother did not appear next morning at breakfast, and I afterwards found out that she had spent the night in tears. She had always considered me, as she told me afterwards, the most devout among her children, — the most careful for the future welfare of my soul, the most earnest in my zeal for the things of another world, her most attentive listener too; and her disappointment, when she found me a backslider, was the greater because of the hopes she had cherished.

Unwilling to add to her sorrow by engaging with her in any religious debate, I fell back, for a solution of some of my difficulties, on a good-natured private tutor, named Manson, who, for a year or two, had been doing his best to teach my brother and myself Greek and Latin, after the tedious, old-fashioned manner. He had studied to qualify himself as a minister of the Scottish Kirk, was orthodox, but mild and tolerant also, and did not meddle with my spiritual education.

The old, old enigma, unsolved through past ages and but dimly guessed at today, came up of course, — the enigma of evil and its punishment.

"Mr. Manson," said I one day, "does God send all unbelievers to hell, and are they tormented there in the flames forever?"

"Certainly. Have n't you read that in the Bible?"

"Yes. Does not God love all men, and wish them to be happy?"

"He surely does. His tender mercies are over all his works."

"Yes; I know the Bible says that too. Then I don't understand about the unbelievers. God need not have created them, unless he chose; and he must have known, before they were born, that they would sin and that they would soon have to be burned to all eternity."

"But you know that God puts it in our power to save ourselves; and if we neglect to do so, it is our fault, not his."

"But yet," persisted I, "God was not obliged to create a man that was sure to be an unbeliever. Nobody said he must. He might have prevented him from being born, and that would have prevented him from being wicked, and prevented him from going to hell. Would n't it have been much better for such men not to be born, than to live a few years here and then be tormented for ever and ever?"

I took my tutor's silent hesitation for consent, and added, "Well, then, if it would have been better, why did n't God do it?"

"I cannot tell you," Mr. Manson said at last; "and I advise you not to think of such things as these. It *seems* better to our human reason; but it cannot *be* better, or else God would have done so."

As may be supposed, this putting aside of the question was unsatisfactory; and from that day I became a Universalist.

Robert Dale Owen.

THE BRIDE OF TORRISDELL.

LONG ago while yet the Saga's dream-red haze
Lay o'er Norway's dales and fjords unbroken;
Ere with Olaf's * cross men saw her steeples blaze,
Ere their mighty iron tongues had spoken;
Then the Neck, the Hulder, elves, and fairies gay
Wooed the summer moon with airy dance and play.
But alas! they fled,
As with flaming head
O'er the valley shone St. Olaf's token.

Thorstein Aasen was forsooth the boldest swain
Ever church-road trod on Sabbath morning;
As a boy he fought the savage bear full fain,
Spite of mother's tears and father's warning;
Never yet was rafter for his heel too high, †
Haughtiest mien he fronted with unquailing eye;
And the rumor's tide
Bore his glory wide,
Still with virtues new his name adorning.

Like a ling'ring echo from the olden time,
Wondrous legends still the twilight haunted,
And o'er Brage's goblet still heroic rhymes
In the merry Yule-tide oft were chanted,
How of Thorstein's race had one at Necken's ‡ will
Stayed the whirl and roar of many a noisy mill;
How in wild delight
At the fall of night
He would seek the river's gloom undaunted.

Late one autumn night, as wild November storms
Whirled the withered leaves in frantic dances,
And half-moonlit clouds of huge fantastic forms
Swift to horror-dreams from rapturous trances
Plunged the restless earth, anon in sudden fear
E'en the raging storm-wind held its breath to hear:

* St. Olaf was the king who finally Christianized Norway. The Pope, after his death, made him the patron saint of the country.

† To be able to kick the rafter is regarded as a great proof of manliness in Norway.

‡ Necken or the Neck is the spirit of the water. He is usually represented as an old man, who plays his harp or (according to others) his violin in the roaring cataracts. His music is said to consist of eleven chords, which are the very essence of all music, and all music appeals to the human heart in the same degree as it partakes of the inherent qualities of "Necken's chords." The legends tell of mortals who have attempted to learn these chords, and have succeeded. Some have learned two, others three, but few more than six. He who is taught to strike the eleventh chord, it is said, must give his own soul in exchange. At the ninth, lifeless objects begin to dance, and when the tenth is struck, the player is seized with such a rapture that he can never sleep, but plays on forever.

From the river's lair
Rose a tremulous air, —
Rose and fell in sweetly flowing stanzas.

But as morning came forth with frosty splendor keen
Where the birch-trees o'er the waters quiver,
Found the grooms their lord with bow and violin,
Ghastly staring down the brawling river.
To his instrument was closely pressed his ear,
As if there some charméd melody to hear;
In his sunken sight
Shone a weird delight;
But life's mystery had flown forever!

From that time the secret sorcery of the tone,
Passed from sire to son by sure transmission,
Had full oft a witching web of music thrown
O'er the lonely forests of tradition;
And full oft the son with pride and secret dole
Heard those strange vibrations in his inmost soul,
Like the muffled knell
Of a distant bell
Fraught with dark and bodeful admonition.

Where the river hurls its foam-crests to the fjord,
There lies Torrisdell in sunshine gleaming;
Oft its valiant lord 'gainst Aasen drew his sword,
And the red cock crew* while blood was streaming.
But his daughter Birgit, — by the holy rood
Ne'er a fairer maid on church or dance-croft stood! —
Like the glacier's gaze
In the sun's embrace
Shone her eye with tender brightness beaming.

And when Thorstein Aasen saw that lily maid
On her palfrey white on church-road riding,
Aye his heart beat loud, and fierce defiance bade
To ancestral feuds their hearts dividing,
And young Birgit, the fair maid of Torrisdell,
Little cared or strove that rising flame to quell;
For, ere spring new-born
Did the fields adorn,
Him she pledged her word and faith abiding.

Loud then swore her angry sire with mead aglow,
(Deadly hate was in his visage painted,)
Rather would he see his daughter's red blood flow,
Than with shame his ancient scutcheon tainted.
In her lonesome bower then fair Birgit lay,
Wept and prayed by night and prayed and wept by day;

* "The red cock crew" is the expression used in the old Norse Sagas for a nightly attack with fire and sword.