

TOO GOOD FOR JESUS.

FOR many weeks I had been visiting regularly in one special ward of the — Hospital, but though I was in the ward always once, often twice during the week, there was one bed that I had always passed by, or rather, I should say, I had never spoken to its occupant.

Sometimes the patient in it was asleep sometimes her head was turned away and her eyes closed as soon as I came near her bed, at other times she would call a nurse to do something for her at that very moment, but at all times there was

on her face a cold, hard, stony look that seemed only varied by a satirical smile, and which effectually deterred me from trying to speak to her.

Often I left flowers, occasionally a Gospel story on the little locker by her bedside; now and then, when I heard her coughing much, I had put some grapes there too as I passed out of the ward; but, even if awake, she never showed by sign or sound of any kind that she had heard me, and it was almost a relief to me that no one had called my special attention to her, so repelled was I by the expression of her face.

She was a woman of nine-and-twenty, with fine regular features, a broad forehead, and large grey eyes. It was an intelligent face, *that* you saw at once; but its cold, cynical

expression made it anything but a pleasing one.

Possibly, had the ward been a smaller one, it would have troubled me more to pass her by thus week after week, but it was very large, and so many were eagerly looking for a visit. Some because they knew the Lord, and it comforted them to be spoken to of Him whom their souls loved; others because they were thirsting for the water of life, yet could not believe that all they had to do was to drink it, for it was flowing freely all around them. Others again, though really caring for none of these things, were sick and lonely, and sometimes friendless too, and a friendly voice and words of sympathy, or a listening ear to their tales of suffering and

woe, brought a little bit of sunlight to cheer them, or, at any rate, varied the monotony of the day, and made them willing to hear of one Friend, the Friend of sinners, whose ear was ever open to them, who was listening for their cry of need to go up to Him, who wanted not merely to help, but to save them.

Thus it was that, in my interest in others, any uneasy feeling which would creep in at times, about passing by the one bed, was quieted: besides, I argued with myself, hers was not at all an urgent case. It was thought in the ward that she was getting better.

In this way weeks rolled on, till at last I felt thoroughly uneasy at being afraid to speak one word for Jesus because of a hard look and

the possibility of a hard word. I am sure it was Satan seeking to keep a door closed against the Lord Jesus, so I asked that blessed Lord Himself to open the door and clear the way if He had any message to give me to carry to that sick woman, and to keep me listening to Him so as to get His own message.

Then came a deep sense of the nothingness of the messenger, and the greatness of the message, that it was EVERYTHING, that His words were Spirit and life, though uttered by ever so slow and stammering a tongue, that I had only to carry His own precious written words, and leave Him to do all the rest.

Now that I was looking for an opened door, I had not long to wait. The Lord opened it simply enough,

thus rebuking me for so long trying to force it open myself, instead of asking Him to do it in His own appointed way.

I had taken into the ward, one day, some flowers in flower-pots, at the special request of one of the nurses, who came down the ward, as we entered, to take them from my hand and that of the friend who was with me. I had just reached the foot of the bed in which Margaret A—— was lying, when the nurse came up, and as she expressed her great admiration of the flowers, she turned to her patient and said, “I will put this one,” taking up a lovely little rose-tree, “opposite your bed, and then you will get the benefit of it.” At the same moment I turned and asked, “Are you fond of

flowers.” “Yes, very,” she answered, and, as the nurse moved on with the rest of her treasures, I drew a chair up to the bedside and began to ask her some simple questions as to her health. She answered these freely enough, told me that she was getting better, and hoped soon to be out, that she had nearly died when she first came in, indeed had never expected to be better again, but now she thought she only needed to get up her strength.

It was really consumption she was suffering from, though she evidently did not know it then, or did not believe it if she had been told such was the case.

We talked a little of her bodily state, and then I said, “You spoke just now very calmly of expecting

death, would it have been a friend or an enemy to you?"

"Oh a friend, certainly," she said, "I have nothing much to live for; I have buried all I loved best on earth. Not but what I have those who love me, and are kind to me, still living," she added in a sort of proud, self-contained manner, as though to say, "Do not for a moment imagine I am an object of pity, even though I have told you my trouble."

"It is terrible agony to lose those we love best," I said. "I, too, have known that sorrow."

She softened a little now, evidently she felt we were on common ground. Pity she would have none of, even sympathy she seemed inclined to resent, as though she feared it might border too closely on pity; but

against some one who had felt the same as she had, she need not arm herself, or put out bristles. Of course she did not say all this in words, but it was plain to me then she felt it, and in after days, when speaking of our first meeting, she frankly owned these had been her feelings.

For a moment there was silence between us, then she told me a little, a very little of her loved and lost ones, adding, "To those who have lost all that made earth a Paradise, how can death be anything but a friend?"

"Then you have no fear of death?"

"No, why should I; I have suffered as much pain already as I should probably suffer if I died."

"I did not mean fear of the bodily suffering of death," I said; "but

have you no shrinking from what comes after death—are you safe for eternity?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, coldly. “Why should I not be safe?”

“There is only one ground of safety,” I answered; “the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Are you safe under the sheiter of His precious blood?”

“I am safe,” she said, “because I never did any harm in my life; I never did anything to make me deserve to go to hell. I was taught religion from my cradle. I have done my duty always, and more than my duty. I went to church, read my Bible, and said my prayers, and worked hard to support myself respectably, and I thank God I have done it. I could not call myself a

sinner even in church, as people do, because I do not feel I am one. I have been always moral and religious."

For some moments I sat in silence, almost bewildered by this long list of virtues, all well remembered and rested securely on as quite sufficient to meet the claims of a perfectly holy God, who cannot look upon sin, and in whose sight the thought of foolishness is sin, who "charges his angels with folly," and before whom the heavens are not clean. My mind wandered off to what God's thoughts of sin are, as expressed and measured by the cross of His Son, and the cry of that Holy One when sin, the sin of others, was laid on Him, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" **Al-**

most without knowing what I was saying, I murmured "I am so sorry for you, so sorry for you."

"Why?" she asked, sharply.

"Oh, because Jesus could not have died for you, and it is the blessedest thing in all the world to know that Jesus died for me."

"Why do you say He did not die for me?" she asked, still more offended; "I have prayed to Him all my life."

"Because you are too good for Jesus. He died for *sinners*, and you say you are not a sinner, you have no interest in Him, for you are secure of heaven through your own good life. So He need not have left His home, veiled His glory, and come down here and suffered and died, for you do not need Him.

Christ died for the ungodly, and you are not ungodly. The Son of Man came to seek *the lost*, but you are not lost. Oh, I am so sorry for you. I would not for worlds be out of the number that Jesus died for.”

“ I cannot say I am a sinner when I am not, and I cannot say I have led a bad life when I have led a good one,” she replied; then added abruptly, “ Good bye, I am tired now,” and summarily and unceremoniously she would have ended our interview; but in spite of the now closed eyelids, as though refusing further conversation on the subject, I said, “ I will read you a verse or two of God’s Word about this, and you need not weary yourself by answering me, but alone with God ponder which is right—God or you.

I read : “ There is *none* righteous, *no, not one.*”

“ There is *none* that understandeth, there is *none* that seeketh after God.”

“ They are *all* gone out of the way ; they are together become unprofitable ; there is *none* that doeth good, *no, not one.*”

“ Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight.”

“ But now the righteousness of God without law is manifest . . . even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Christ Jesus, unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference.”

“ For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

“ This is man’s side of the picture,

all sin, all badness ; and now look at God's side, all love, all goodness. ' But God commendeth His love toward us, in that *while* we were yet *sinner*s, Christ died for us.' "

In spite of the closed eyelids, I could tell by her face she was listening ; but there came no answer, and leaving a little book called " Abraham believed God " by the side of the flowers on her locker—she had a Bible of her own—I passed on to the other end of the ward, asking the Lord to let His own Word do its work in her heart, and shake her out of her false rest, her false security.

Later in the afternoon, as I again passed her bed on my way out, I noticed that her eyes were open, and she was watching me, with an

anxious look on her face, but did not stop, or speak again, wanting to leave her alone with the Word of God, and feeling that any words of mine, or any argument, could but weaken the power of that precious Word. A week passed away before I saw her again, a week, during which she had been constantly in my thoughts, and I alternately desired and dreaded the day to come for me to go to that ward again. I was interested in the woman, and yet I shrank from going back to her.

It had seemed comparatively easy to tell people, who were anxious to be saved, of a Saviour who was willing to be *their* Saviour, or even to warn of danger and coming judgment those who knew and owned they were sinners, and to entreat

them not to linger or delay; but here was one resting peacefully in fancied security, not merely unconscious of danger, but disbelieving the very possibility of it. I trembled lest anything I might say should lull her still, and would gladly have sent a friend in my place: but my friend had others she had promised to see, and had no time, so in conscious weakness I entered that ward, and went straight up to her bed.

She was sitting up in bed, wide awake now, and evidently expecting me. The self-satisfied look was gone from her face, and an anxious enquiring expression had taken its place. She seemed relieved that I came at once to her, and as I sat down, said, in a low hurried tone, "I was very rude to you last time."

I could see how much it cost a proud spirit like hers to say even those few words, and felt as though it must be the Lord who had broken her down, and therefore that He must have commenced a work in her.

“Never mind,” I said; “would you like me to stay a little while with you to-day and read?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered. “I have had no rest for days, for though I pretended not to listen, those verses of Scripture have never been out of my head since. I thought I was good enough, and I find I am a sinner. I thought I had a better chance of heaven than most, though, of course, nobody can know for certain, and I find I have no chance at all. I was so angry with you

when you said you were so sorry for me, that Jesus could not have died for me; but the words have haunted me all the time."

I could only say "Thank God."

"Why do you thank God?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Because He has brought you off the ground on which there was no hope for you, on to ground where Jesus can meet you and save you. Before, you shut Christ out by your goodness, now, you have taken the place of a lost sinner, you are the very one for Jesus, for He is Jehovah the Saviour."

She only looked hard at me. The wrong thoughts of years were slowly being dispelled; but it seemed as though the darkness disputed every inch of ground with the light.

“You made two great mistakes just now,” I added, seeing she did not speak. “You said nobody could know for certain, and that you found you had no chance at all. Now God speaks *certainly*. He says, ‘Whosoever believeth on Him’—*i.e.*, on Christ Jesus—‘shall not perish but have everlasting life’—that He *is passed* from death unto life. So you *can* know for certain. And Jesus says ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out’; *i.e.*, every one that comes He receives; so that makes room for you.”

Her eyes had a far-away look in them; as though gazing at something which was before her soul. “God says it,” she said; “and I am to be like Abraham, and believe

it, though it seems impossible, and God will think more of that than of all the good life I boasted in. Is that it?"

I wondered for a moment at her reference to Abraham. She saw my surprised look, and explained, "That little book you left, I read it—I read it over and over again; so much in it suits me. Abraham took his true place." Then breaking down utterly, pride, reserve, self-righteousness, everything gone, she burst into tears, and cried, "I *am* a sinner, I want to be saved, I want Jesus."

My heart was full. I could scarcely keep from crying too. It was with choking voice I said, "He says, 'Look unto me and *be ye saved.*' *Jesus wants you.*" "I do

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look. I do believe," she answered, and presently added, "The little book said that too 'Look unto me,' 'Look now.' Is that all I have to do? Is God satisfied?"

"Perfectly. You look at Jesus, God looks at Jesus. It is not your looking, though look you must; it is *Jesus* that satisfies God, the one you look at."

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "the perfect sacrifice who was delivered for *our* offences," and there was a long, long pause: I could not break it.

After a time she said, "But what about to-morrow, I have a bad temper, and I take things hardly if they go wrong."

"Shall I tell you," I said, "what a man of God said to me once, 'The

first look at Christ is life, and every after look at Him is the power of living.' Do you understand?"

"I think I do," she said. "We get saved when we first look to Jesus, and while we keep on looking at Jesus, we live and talk like people who are saved, then when I feel I am getting wrong, I am just to look back to Him."

"Yes. Consider Him, and listen to Him. 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me' He says."

"Yes, I see, its to be all Jesus—all Jesus, this *is* rest."

And so after years of fancied security, and a week of agony in the presence of realised danger, He made her to lie down in the green pastures, and led her beside the

still waters which He Himself had provided, comforted her with His own voice and led her on by it too. Much passed between us, that in this brief space it is impossible to record, both at the time and in the months that followed, showing how deeply the word of God cut into her very soul. My visits to her were full of the deepest interest to me. She lived three months longer. For weeks neither she nor I had any thought of her dying. She seemed to gain strength, her appetite improved, and she gained flesh too, was up, and dressed, and moving about the ward half of each day, sometimes reading to the other patients, sometimes speaking a few words in her shy reserved way, of the Saviour she had found, and doing

many a little act of kindness for one and another of them.

She read much of God's word, fed on it, and her soul caught the hope of the Lord's coming to fetch His people, and gloried in it. In the ward I had heard of her always from the nurses, as the most troublesome and exacting of patients, and the patients had spoken of her as selfish, and bad tempered, and disagreeable. Now everyone was talking of the change. The nurses could not understand it, she seemed so very grateful for the smallest attention and so unwilling to give trouble; while her fellow patients were constantly speaking of the wonderful change that had come over her, and of how good and kind she was to all whom she could help. The

woman in the next bed, who was a Christian, told me that all through one night—which I found was the very night of the day on which she had found Jesus—she herself had slept very little, and had heard Margaret singing in a low voice to herself, “I, the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me,” over and over again, “And so, Ma’am,” she said, “I thought that must be the reason of the change, that she had found out two things, herself as a sinner, and Jesus as her Saviour.”

Some weeks passed on thus, and then she suddenly broke down in health, and from that day failed rapidly. Very calm she was, and restful. It hardly seemed a surprise to her, and her desire increased to see the Lord and be with Him.

“How He bore with me,” she used to say; “He the Holy One bore with my pride and folly, with my looking down on my neighbours. When I heard you read and speak of sin, as though you had felt it, to some of the others, I wondered what very wicked things you had done, and prided myself afresh on my own, as I thought, spotless life, and all the time the Lord saw me as I was, bad altogether, bad all the way through. Oh, how bitter it was to me that first day to find out what you said was true, that I must be a sinner or I had no claim on Jesus. How sweet it is now to know that it was just for such sinners Jesus died.

‘Thousand, thousand thanks to Thee;
Jesus, Lord for ever be.’”

I saw her the last day of her life; she had waited then almost to a skeleton, she was propped up in bed, her breathing very hard and distressing, and large drops were trickling down her face, yet her expression was still calm and peaceful. She was too far gone for me to speak many words to her. Bending over her, I said—

“You are nearly home.”

A smile broke over her face, a sunny smile. “Near Him,” she answered; “Jesus . . . died . . . for me . . . a sinner . . . I am . . . going . . . to Him.”

“They shall see His face,” I whispered.

“One . . . verse . . . more, she said, and I quoted,—“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me,

be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

She smiled once more—a glad smile—and looked up at me, too exhausted now to speak again.

In the night-time, towards day-break, her night ended for ever, and her morning was the sunlight of His own presence. Quietly she passed to be with Jesus, His own name the last on her lips.

“This Man receiveth sinners.”

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