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H. Thomas

THE BIBLE IN THE WALL.

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THE
BIBLE IN THE WALL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

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THE
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CHAPTER I.

ANTONIO AND HIS BIBLE.

IN the beginning of the summer of 1856, a young journeyman bricklayer, full of life and spirits, left his home in the Swiss Canton, Tessin, to seek for work this side the mountains, that is, in German Switzerland. His tools, with a few articles of clothing were made into a bundle, which he carried on a stick over his shoulder.

As he was going along he met a lady, who spoke to him, and presented him with an Italian Bible, begging him most earnestly and cordially to read it, as it was the Word of God, and pointed out the way to everlasting life.

Antonio, for that was the young man's name, took the gift hesitatingly, without offering a word of thanks, and, giving it a push into his bundle, he went on his way. Various thoughts, however, troubled him; before setting out on his journey into Protestant countries, the priest of his native place had often warned him and his companions against the "soul-destroying books of the heretics," but most of all against the Bible, and there was he carrying that "dangerous book" in his bundle. He determined to get rid of it again as soon as possible; he was only in doubt whether to throw it away at once, or to wait for a better opportunity. At length he reached the lovely little Swiss country-town

of Glâris, or Glarus, where he, with some other natives of Tessin, soon found work.

He was employed in the erection of a fine, stately new building. One day while at work, laying the bricks of a buttress, he came to a gap in the wall which wanted filling up, when a thought, that seemed to him wonderfully clever, flashed through his mind: he would fill up the gap with the Bible that had been given him. "And," he exclaimed, laughing, "we'll see whether the devil will get it out again in a hurry!"

His townsmen who were at work on the same building, thought the idea a capital one, so Antonio at once put it into execution. He took the book out of his bundle, gave it two or three heavy blows with his hammer, which left several deep dents in the cover, and then, amidst roars of laughter, he forced it into the opening and covered it with mortar.


Winter was approaching, the brickwork of the house

was finished, and Antonio, as well as others of his countrymen, began to think of returning home, but with only a small portion of their earnings, frequent indulgence in drink having robbed them of the greater part.



CHAPTER II.

THE WILD SOUTH-WIND.

IVE years have elapsed. Let us give another glance at Glarus. This wealthy, busy little town, with its 4000 inhabitants, situated nearly in the centre of the beautiful country of Switzerland, extends a short distance along the bank of the Linth. The chief ornament of the place is a row of very fine public buildings, but the wealth of the inhabitants is due to its numerous manufactories, the machinery of which is worked either by steam or by the strong current of the river. On all sides it is bounded by luxuriant green meadows, which extend up the slopes of the mountains on either side of the valley, whilst from the east the cheerful, sunny peak of the

Shilt looks smilingly down, and from the south-west the gigantic, melancholy, rocky mass of the Gläruisch, contemplates with solemn gravity the busy doings of the little world beneath.

But this lovely spot, adorned as it is with all the charms and grandeur of a Swiss landscape, has also bitterly experienced the terrors caused by the revolutions of nature to which Swiss towns are exposed.

Glarus is situated at the northern extremity of a valley through which the Linth flows from south to north. But gales and hurricanes frequently take the same path, of which that known by the name of "Der wilde Föhn" (wild south wind) is most dreaded. It gives warning of its approach in various ways:—a strange dismal roaring is heard up among the mountains, a wild rustling in the forests, and at length, like a pent up mountain-stream that has burst its dam, the raging storm roars through the higher valleys, and casts itself

howling into their greatest depths. Houses are unroofed, trees torn up by their roots, pieces of rock torn from the mountain-steeps, and hurled into the depths below. Suddenly a perfect calm ensues, but fresh bursts follow ; in the course of a few days, the storm abates, and the north wind, with rain, has the sway.

Those are days of danger for our charming Glarus, days that may return ten or twelve times a year. Its inhabitants know the danger, and have therefore from remote ages made the severest laws to be enforced during the time this wild "Föhn" rages. All workmen who use fire in their operations, as locksmiths and blacksmiths, must cease working and put out their fires ; no light is allowed to burn in the factories, nor may any steam-engine be set in motion ; all lights and fire must be banished from the dwellings, no bread may be baked, and in some places even cooking is prohibited.

Shooting is forbidden, and special watchmen pace the streets to see that the laws are observed.

Was it the strict observance of these laws, or was it not rather the merciful and kind protection of God, which had preserved Glarus for centuries from the devastation of fire? It is true that in the years 1299 and 1337 it was reduced to ashes, and in 1477 suffered much injury from fire; but for the last four centuries it had escaped all hurt. No wonder, therefore, that many of its inhabitants began to look upon these severe laws, these precautions against fire, as something burdensome, old-fashioned, and useless, which must yield to the demands of the present age, especially to the requirements of trade and industry.

On Ascension-day, May 9th, 1861, a "Landsgemeinde" was held at Glarus. That is, an assembly of all the men of the land, who are qualified to vote and to bear arms. It is always held in the open


air. It is the highest legislative power, and as such, under the presidency of the "Landmann," has to consider and transact all public business.

On that day there had been warm and earnest debates upon taxes, forest-laws, and street and school matters. A proposition, too, was moved for the abolition of the severe and burdensome fire-laws. But after the "pros" and "cons" had been duly discussed, it was decided, by a large majority of votes, to retain those old and approved regulations.



CHAPTER III.

THE FIRE.

N Friday morning, May 10th, the "Föhn" gave warning of its approach in its usual way.

No one was particularly alarmed at these well-known signs, and on Friday evening every one retired to rest as usual, except a few here and there who remained together to enjoy social intercourse a little longer. But suddenly, between nine and ten o'clock at night, the cry of "Fire!" was heard. The flames were seen issuing from a stable. The firemen came rushing to the spot from all sides; but it was already burning in three or four places, for the increasing "Föhn" had driven forward the flames with the speed of lightning. The progress of the fire westward,

where the roof of the apothecary's house was in flames, could be stopped with the aid of the fire engines, but nothing could stay its progress from south to north, which was the very course of the "Föhn." The burning roofs reduced to thousands of flaming fragments were carried further and further by the wind, kindling fresh fire wherever they fell.

In the course of half an hour from two to three hundred roofs were in flames. Those who had rushed to the spot where the fire first broke out, in order to lend their aid, now beheld their own dwellings in a blaze, and without being able to render any assistance, with steps quickened by despair, could but just get back in time to rescue their dear ones and save the remainder of their property.

The confusion, noise, and terror was beyond description. "No human imagination," says a reporter, "can form a picture of that terrible hour. The dread-

ful, crackling flames ; the desperate efforts of the firemen, who at length, for their own safety's sake, are obliged to abandon their engines or to throw them into the stream ; the loud wailings of the women and children, running for safety they know not whither ; and, added to this, the howling of the storm, and the roaring of the ever-augmenting sea of fire ! Who can paint such a scene ?”

But amidst the fury of the elements and the weakness of man, He, “who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire” (Psalm civ. 4), could, and did, in His mercy, send help. The peals of the fire-bell were of course lost in the general tumult, and in vain did Mount Glärnisch, illuminated to its summit, proclaim to all the neighbouring hamlets the terrible calamity, for not one of them had sufficient fire-engines, or other means for extinguishing fire, even for its own protection. Oh, if help could be obtained from Zürich, from the

well populated towns on the lakes—from Wallenstadt or from Sargaus!

In vain does the faithful officer in charge of the telegraph keep his post, and in spite of all difficulties, of smoke, and of the heated atmosphere, perseveres in sending his dispatches to Schwanden, to Uznach, to Zürich, begging for speedy succour, for his signals are unheeded, there is no answer to his earnest appeals. The Swiss telegraph at that time was not worked in the night: nevertheless before driven from his office by the flames, he thought he would make one last effort—he would telegraph to Rapperschwyl. He did so, and most providentially the clerk there happened to have been detained in his office till this unusual hour. He heard to his great astonishment the warning of the apparatus, and soon read the terrible words: “Fire! fire! a dreadful fire! help! speedy help!” The clerk immediately gave the alarm, and in

a very little while a special train, with firemen and engines, was on its way to Glarus, which they reached at day-break, just in time to rescue some of the more important buildings.

Shortly after, trains bearing more engines and more men arrived from Zürich, Wallensee, and Sargaus, when a fearful struggle between human power, skill, and discretion on the one side, and the blind fury of the elements on the other, ensued. The large manufactories to which the inhabitants of Glarus owe all their prosperity were saved; a barrier was erected which the fire could not pass, and at length the wind also abating, the fire, that all-devouring element, could find nothing further to devour.

On Saturday morning, Glarus, once so flourishing, lay buried—at least two thirds of it—in ashes and ruins; and these were enveloped in dark smoke, in dense black vapour, now and then pierced by hissing

tongues of fire. Among the four hundred and ninety buildings that were consumed, three hundred were dwelling houses. Most of the public edifices were converted into heaps of smoking ruins, but the well-to-do middle classes were they who had suffered most, for they had lost their all.

But the flames that devoured Glarus kindled in the hearts of the Helvetic confederacy a fire of emulating, practical, compassionate love to such an extent as is rarely to be found in history. Help of all kinds literally streamed to these their brothers in distress. Provisions, clothing, beds, household-furniture, tools, and large sums of money came in on all sides; and, besides this, the most able and influential men of the land put themselves, with their sound advice and practical, judicious activities, quite at the disposal of their poor unfortunate countrymen.

The houseless, and destitute being forthwith provided

with shelter and all the necessities of life, the summer and ensuing winter were devoted to clearing away the rubbish, and to drawing out plans for new buildings, and as soon as the swallows again made their appearance (Spring, 1862), troops of workmen, of masons and carpenters, found their way to the spot where Glarus had stood, to erect on its ashes a larger and finer town.



CHAPTER IV.

FINDING THE BIBLE.

THE Canton of Tessin and the north of Italy are the chief sources which supply south and central Switzerland with masons. In Spring almost every day groups of them may be seen making their way over the mountains, with their red bundles on their shoulders, containing mallets, trowels, and a few articles of clothing; and at the approach of winter they are seen wandering back again in the same manner with the savings of six or eight months' labour.

One such group, consisting of from twelve to fifteen men, some young and some middle-aged, crossed the Splügen to seek for work at the rebuilding of Glarus.

They were in various moods ; the young lads full of life and eagerness to see fresh countries, strange people, and new customs, were playing all kinds of tricks and passing merry jokes, to while away the time, and now and then breaking out into the favourite Garibaldi song. But one of them, quite a young man, would frequently take a book out of his pocket and try to read portions from it aloud to his companions. He availed himself of all the pauses that were made for this purpose, and never lost an opportunity of speaking of the great value and important contents of his book.

The young man was an Italian, born in the neighbourhood of Genoa. He had been formerly a Roman Catholic, but was now a zealous member of a free, evangelical church ; the book which was the constant theme of his praise, and whose wonderful contents he was so anxious to bring before the notice of his companions was the New Testament. But alas ! he had as

yet little more than discovered the deadly errors of the Church of Rome, without having thoroughly understood the living truth of the gospel of salvation, and therefore in his conversation he was wont to attack the follies of Popery, and to render it ridiculous, rather than to proclaim the sweet truth of the free grace of God in Christ; consequently there was more strife and bitter words between himself and his bigoted Catholic companions, in the course of their journey, than mutual edification.

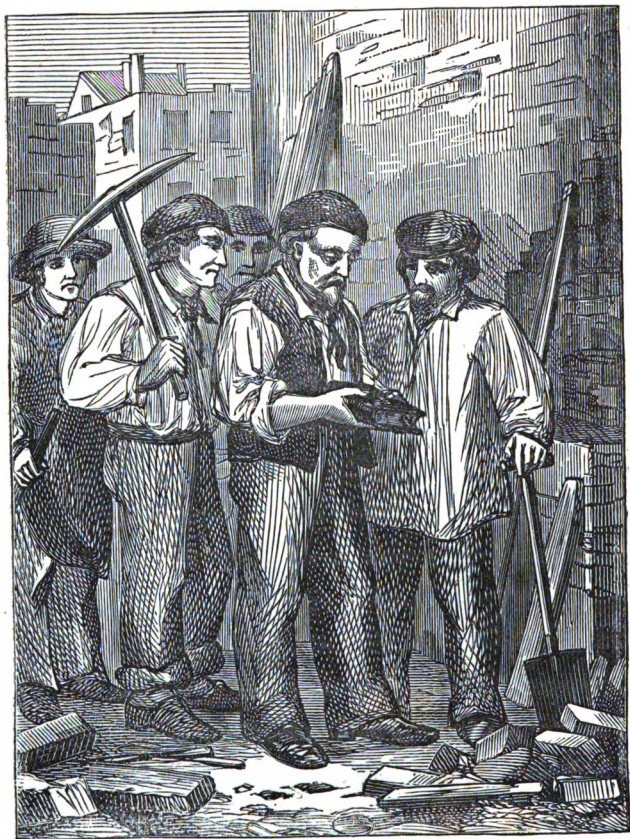
One of their number, however, was particularly quiet and thoughtful, and seemed to take great pleasure in listening to his young companion. He was an elderly man, between fifty and sixty years of age.

John, or Giovanni as he was called, was a Piedmontese. He took no part in the freaks and follies of his fellow-travellers; but on the contrary, was very sorrowful and gloomy, for he had left a wife and several

children at home, in his remote native village, almost without any means of support, and could not hope to see them again for seven or eight months, while he himself had in prospect a summer's hard labour in a strange land.

Nothing but the hope of earning by dint of great industry a tolerable sum of money, and of bringing his savings home to his beloved family for the winter, could help to bear him up, and encourage him to proceed.

Giovanni had, however, special reasons for listening with such marked attention and pleasure to the reading of the Testament, as well as to the remarks made upon it by his young companion, for when at home a Christian lady had presented him with a copy of this very book; but his priest had demanded it of him, and Giovanni, not knowing at that time its true value, had given it up without much opposition. He now regretted that he had been so cowardly.



At length, after some difficulty, the mountains were crossed, and Glarus was reached. Giovanni and his companions immediately found work, though not at the same building. The former got the commission to rebuild a house, of which part of the walls were still standing. But, before he could proceed with the masonry, it was necessary to ascertain by means of heavy blows, whether these walls were really solid and strong enough to be allowed to remain and be used for the new building.

“That was evidently quite a new house,” said Giovanni to one of the workmen, who were in a measure under his superintendence; “and it can’t have stood more than five or six years, if as much. These bricks are in good condition, and yet, just look, they are burnt to ashes inside; some of them are quite hollow. Let’s see how far the damage goes.” Upon this, he swung his pick-axe in the air, and bringing it down with

great force, knocked out several bricks, but with them—to the great astonishment of all—a book fell to the ground.

Giovanni picked it up, and with surprise and pleasure, which scarcely permitted him to speak, he exclaimed, “A Bible!”

The workmen all crowded round him, to see the wonderful thing with their own eyes, while Giovanni, not without a momentary shudder, opened the book, and read aloud the first words that met his eye. They were in Proverbs xii. 2, “A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.”

“Oh! how happy I am,” he exclaimed, clasping the book with an expression of deep gratitude; “how I have been longing for a Bible, I know I don’t deserve this wonderful gift, for once before, when I had one given me by a lady, our priest asked it of me, and I

was fool enough to give it him. But this book—*I'll die before I'll give it up!*"

Most of the Italians that surrounded Giovanni, and witnessed his emotion, were unable to read, so they did not dispute his keeping the book. What seemed to them of far greater importance than the book itself, was to ascertain by what means it could have come there. They examined the wall out of which it had fallen, and came to the conclusion, that it had been placed there purposely. Three deep dents on the cover did not escape their notice, and these, too, evidently were not accidentally, but had been caused by severe blows. Be all that as it might, Giovanni, with a heart full of joy, took possession of the Bible as a gift from the hand of God.

From this time forward he read the book every day in all his leisure moments. On Sundays he assembled a number of his countrymen, and read aloud portions

from it to them, for the fame of this strangely-discovered Bible soon spread itself, and many came out of mere curiosity to see the book.

Giovanni was of course unable to give any exposition of what he read, being himself only a learner, but he had sufficient judgment to begin with the New Testament, which is more easily understood, and by degrees only to refer to the Old Testament, and then more especially to the Psalms, from which he first learned to pray. And the Holy Ghost took of the things of Christ, and shewed them, not only to Giovanni, but to many of his hearers, and as they proceeded, step by step, more light was given them.

There was no lack, however, of bitter controversy, of rude revilings, nor ultimately of severe threats ; all of which would have tended greatly to intimidate our friend Giovanni, and to make him weary and dispirited, had it not been for a Swiss evangelist who had found his

way to the building-place, had made Giovanni's acquaintance, and who gave him, not only much encouragement, but the very good advice, to try and establish a sort of free school in the labourer's hut, where he and many others lived, and to spend all his leisure time in instructing his ignorant countrymen in reading, writing, and arithmetic. This would naturally interest them and win their hearts.

Giovanni willingly agreed, and joyfully set to work. At first a large number presented themselves for instruction, but though the unusual head-work added to weariness of body drove some away, others remained, and their perseverance was soon rewarded by the gift of an Italian New Testament, a Christian lady having supplied means for this purpose.

The very important services that Giovanni, through all this, was rendering to his countrymen soon became apparent, in mere external things. For those workmen

whom he had taught to read, and write, and cipher, were henceforth far less exposed to the many impositions which an unprincipled builder would now and then practise upon them when paying their wages. They could reckon for themselves, and could go over their own accounts, and thus escape many an attempted fraud. And what joy for him, who had formerly been obliged to leave his dear ones at home without any news from himself for many months together, now to be able both to write letters home, and to read those sent to him.

Oh, how easy and simple are the many ways in which we may render to our fellow-creatures, services of love ! Love to God and to His holy word had taught Giovanni, our master-mason and school-master, to render such services to his fellow-labourers.


Nor was his influence upon them any less with regard to spiritual things. He learnt by degrees to instruct

his scholars, young and old, with much more clearness and ability in the fundamental truths of Christianity, but the full effect all this had on the souls of his hearers was known only to God.



CHAPTER V.

GIOVANNI AND THE PRIEST.

S the Summer of 1862 was fine and dry, the masonry-work proceeded rapidly, and Giovanni was already beginning to look forward to the day when he should bend his steps towards home, and take to his beloved ones the precious sum that industry and economy had enabled him to lay by.

At length November came, with its short days and long nights, and all the Italian labourers prepared for their departure. Our friend Giovanni could scarcely await the day when he should again see his dear wife

and children, so on one of the early days of November he set off.

Crossing the mountains was attended with some danger, owing to the snow-storms having already set in, but this only increased his joy when at length he was permitted to reach his home in safety. He had not forgotten to stock his bundle with little presents for the gratification of his children. For the eldest daughter—a great favourite—he had brought a pair of pinch-beck earrings, the favourite ornaments of the Italian women.

But in the joyful cup of re-union one bitter drop was mingled: his good wife, one day in the Autumn, had been carrying a heavy sack of chestnuts down the steep slope of the hill, in order to sell them in the neighbouring town, when, her foot slipping, she had a severe fall, and broke her arm. There being no proper doctor in the village, the bone could not be set, so the poor

woman was rendered a cripple for life. The now useless member hung down by her side, and instead of being of service to her, it was greatly in the way.

This was indeed a bitter cup for poor Giovanni. But the Lord had prospered his labour in the summer, so that the money he had brought home would, with God's blessing, just last through the winter months. With a part of the same he bought a goat, and as the hay had turned out well, and the chestnut harvest been very plentiful, they need suffer no want.

In the winter evenings the father had many things to relate. He talked about the fire of Glarus, and of the wonderful escapes and preservations he had heard speak of; about the manners and customs of the people in the foreign country, and about his journey over the mountains, and its dangers; but the most important of all subjects, was, and remained to be, the strange

tale of the discovery of the Bible. He never tired of telling about it, and all the neighbours came to hear the wonderful story with their own ears, and to see the strange book with their own eyes. It was quite natural, too, that they should wish to hear something read out of it, and Giovanni was only too glad to gratify their desire in this respect.

But these simple people soon began to feel that what was read to them was much more beautiful, more instructive, and more easily understood than the Latin mass, and the dull sermons of their priest. No wonder, therefore, that Giovanni's hut was visited almost every evening by numbers of souls thirsting for salvation !

One day a visitor knocked at the door, whom Giovanni had long been expecting. It was the priest himself. He desired, without much preface, to see this much-vaunted Bible.

“Certainly you shall, Herr Pfarrer (Mr. Priest),”

answered Giovanni;" but with the condition that you do not take it from me, for God Himself has given me the book."

"Blockhead," cried the priest; "you don't know what harm such a book does when it falls into the hands of people in your station of life!"

But this time Giovanni was immoveable. He knew that full religious liberty now existed throughout Italy, and that the priests had no longer power to compel people to observe the rules, and hold the dogmas of the Romish Church. In vain did the priest threaten him with excommunication from the church, and, to the terror of his wife and children, with all the horrors of eternal damnation; for Giovanni well knew what God had given him in the precious volume, and he steadfastly refused to give it up. The priest had to depart without it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIBLE STALL.

FVER since the dawn of religious liberty in the Italian States, several Bible-societies in England, France, and Switzerland, as well as individual friends of the kingdom of God, have been most zealous in availing themselves of this period of liberty—perhaps not to be of long duration—in sowing the seeds of the Divine Word, throughout the whole country, by means of “Bible-colporteurs.”

One of these colporteurs heard of Giovanni's zeal and love for the Word of God, and of his firm behaviour towards the priest. He (the colporteur) repeated what he had heard to the friends who had sent him out, and

they immediately made the enquiry, whether Giovanni would like to enter their service a few weeks, and become a Bible-seller in Lombardy.

We must bear in mind that our mason had by no means left the Church of Rome, and while he was most zealous in reading his Bible, he still went regularly to mass, and took part in all the Roman Catholic ceremonies. The soul, that from its youth has imbibed the errors of the Romish Church, cannot easily and in a short time divest itself altogether of them, and come to a clear understanding of the truth, especially when it has little or no communication with other and more enlightened Christians. Nevertheless, Giovanni was quite delighted with the proposal, and, in spite of the fears of his still unenlightened wife and the threats of his priest, he set off after a few days with a pack of Bibles and Testaments on his back.

The life of a colporteur is a very burdensome and

difficult one. Giovanni experienced this. At first he sold his Bibles very quickly. He was kindly received wherever he went, especially in the towns, where he generally took his stand in the market-place and offered his very uncommon goods for sale. And when, in all simplicity and sincerity, he began to praise the intrinsic value of his books, he was eagerly listened to.

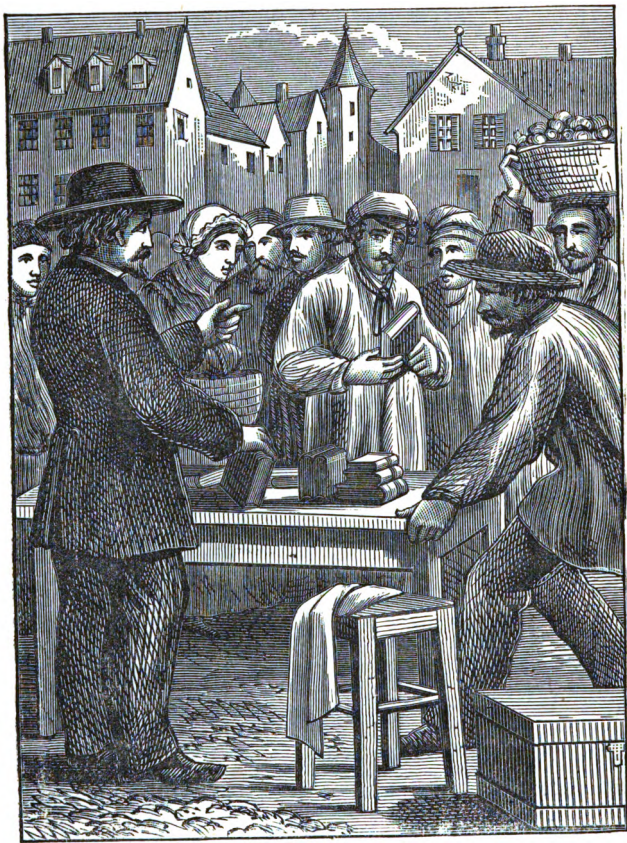
All this so greatly increased his courage, that he at length formed the bold resolution to take his pack of Bibles to Lugano, the capital of the Swiss Canton, Tessin, and try what could be done there, though he knew that the liberty of selling Bibles did not exist in that place as it did in Italy. But as he had a great many acquaintances there, with whom he had often been at work, he determined at all events to venture.

It happened to be the yearly market-day, so that the table on which he had arranged his Bibles for sale soon became surrounded with inquisitive gazers. He soon

discovered, however, that the intentions of these people towards him were more likely to be bad than good.

Giovanni was in the act of urging his hearers to supply themselves with the Word of God, calling their attention to the cheapness of the volumes, their beautiful bindings, and above all, their blessed contents ; when a young man from among the crowd came forward, and said exultingly, if he were in want of a Bible he could soon get one for nothing, and that, too, in Glarus, where five or six years ago he had plastered up one in the wall of a house ; for he was sure, in spite of the fire that consumed the place, the devil had not been able to get it out again !

At these words Giovanni looked the young man in the face, evidently much astonished and greatly moved ; and then, after a short pause, he replied, " Yes, that is true, in spite of the fire, that Bible has been taken great care of—it was saved almost by a miracle !"



He then very simply related how that God (and not Satan) had permitted the precious book to fall into his hands, and what a great blessing it had been made, first to himself, and afterwards to many others.

Now it was the young man's turn to be astonished.

"What!" cried Antonio, for it was none other than he; "you mean to say you have found the Bible that I enclosed in the buttress at Glarus? Let's see the book! I should know it anywhere from the dents I made in the cover."

Giovanni drew his beloved Bible from his pocket, and handed it to Antonio, who was not a little surprised, and evidently rather disconcerted to behold again, whole and uninjured, the book which he believed he had put beyond the reach of every human being.

"Besides," Giovanni continued; "every man that worked with me last summer in Glarus could tell you the same story. Come now, young man, buy the Bible

of me, not to hide it this time, but to read it, and learn from it how to become a true Christian."

"Go to the devil with your Bibles," cried Antonio, in whose bosom the old hatred towards this holy book had once more gained the mastery; "we will have nothing to do with them; and who, I should like to know, has given you permission to come here?"

With that he threw down the Bible, and began to stir up his comrades against our poor colporteur, and before Giovanni could foresee it, they overthrew his table, inflicted upon himself some severe blows, and did not rest till he with his Bibles had quitted Lugano.

With a heavy heart our poor friend hastened home to recover himself from his fatigue, and especially from the recent ill-treatment he had received.


He gave a strict account of the sale of his Bibles to those who had employed him; and as in the meanwhile the Spring of 1863 had come, he took up his hammer

and trowel, bade farewell to home, and once more bent his steps towards Switzerland, to get employment there during the summer months.



CHAPTER VII.

ANTONIO IN THE HOSPITAL.

HE patience and longsuffering of God, in following up the arrogant, stubborn sons of men, and trying to save them from destruction of their own choosing, is truly astonishing and above all measure.

The second time had Antonio, that rough bricklayer from Tessin, most rudely and wickedly refused to accept this same Bible, by means of which the God of love would have drawn him to Himself, and made him eternally happy. Nevertheless, a third time does this indefatigable, compassionate love of a gracious and long-suffering God cross his path, and again in the form

of this self-same Bible, to see if perchance this time he might not bend his stiff neck and permit himself to be grasped from perdition.

Our now aged Giovanni had again obtained work in one of the Swiss towns, when he discovered that his stubborn antagonist, Antonio, was not only at work in the same town, but at the very same building. The latter felt rather awkward at first, but by degrees, especially when he marked with what respect all the other men treated Giovanni, who was in a manner placed over all the Italian workmen, he himself began to feel more regard and even some affection for him. He was most anxious to make Giovanni forget the ill-treatment he had received at Lugano at his instigation. Giovanni on his side willingly forgot the past, and began to take great interest in the young man.

One day Antonio was carrying a heavy piece of stone up one of the unsteady ladders of the scaffolding, when

his foot slipped, perhaps from weakness caused by frequent and excessive drink, and he fell down backwards from a height of about fifty feet. He was carried, perfectly insensible, to the little hospital in the town, where the patients were nursed by sisters of charity. Poor young man, there he lay for weeks and months on a bed of suffering; but the thoughts of his God towards him were thoughts of peace.

Giovanni, who had witnessed the fall, frequently visited him. How often formerly had he not warned him against his sinful course of life, and reminded him of the inevitable chastisement of God. But now, with tenderness and affection, he directed the unhappy man to the Good Shepherd who was, in this great affliction, seeking to bring this wandering sheep to Himself.

Of course, Giovanni could remain but a short time in the sick room, for his heavy day's labour, beginning at four o'clock in the morning and not ending till nightfall,



left him but little time and—at his age—little strength to visit the sick. Wishing, however, to do something more for poor Antonio, he left him his old, precious Bible, on the condition that he would read it and take all possible care of it.

Antonio, who at first cared nought for the book, and whose presence, if anything, was only disagreeable to him, on one of his tedious days nevertheless chanced to take it up.

Some Christian women, who used to visit him, frequently found him with the book in his hand, but seeing that he did nothing but turn over the leaves, they directed his attention to the twelfth chapter of the Hebrews, which treats on the blessing of tribulation, and on the love of God which manifests itself in a special manner in chastisement. This arrested his attention, and was soothing to his dark and murmuring heart. From henceforward he frequently read the

Bible, and owing to the sensible directions of these Christian friends, in showing him what passages to read and how to read them, as well as to their clear explanations of the same, he by degrees began to make progress in Christian knowledge, and in love to the Word of God itself.

Our poor patient at first hoped to be perfectly restored in the course of six weeks, but six months elapsed before he could put his foot to the ground, and drag himself about the room on crutches. In the fall he had broken his hip, which left him a cripple for life. His Christian friends assured him that it would never be possible for him to resume his former occupation as mason, and for that reason advised and encouraged him to devote all the hours in which he was free from pain to reading and study, so as to increase his general knowledge. They thought that perhaps on returning to his native place he might be able to gain his livelihood by im-


parting instruction to others. He took their advice, and applied himself to study with great zeal; and while he made rapid progress in many useful branches of knowledge, his taste for spiritual things increased daily.

At length he acquired the deepest and most important knowledge a man can get, which was this: he learned that he was a great sinner, deserving eternal damnation, but that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could cleanse even such a sinner as he from all sin. From this time forward he experienced peace and joy which he retained in spite of the severe trial under which he was bowed down; yea, more, he could even thank God for the affliction, in which it had pleased Him to bring him to Himself.



CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

N Autumn, 1863, Antonio was at length able to return home. He is now a teacher in a Christian school in Italy (not in Tessin, his native place, which is not yet open to Christianity). The little town in which he labours as schoolmaster is surrounded by villages in which several Christian families are to be found, and as there is no proper school-house as yet, he has arranged for the children of these families to come to his own dwelling twice a week to receive instruction. He then gives them lessons and exercises to be learned and written at their own homes on the intervening days. This they do in their leisure

hours, that is to say, when not obliged to work with their parents in the fields. In the mean-time Antonio spends his leisure days in holding meetings in the neighbourhood, and in trying to spread the knowledge of the Word of God; for with the aid of a stick he can now walk these short distances without fear of over-exerting himself; and, as since his conversion he leads a blameless and regular life, his health has become greatly improved.

We have still to notice that our old friend, Giovanni has consented to the marriage of his eldest daughter with the young school-master, Antonio, to whom he has naturally become much more attached, since the happy change which has taken place in him. Both his wife and daughter have received the truth, and renounced the errors of the Roman Catholic Church.

He has promised that, at his death, the Bible that was found in the wall shall become the property of his

son-in-law, who of course can never look at it without the colour rushing to his cheeks.

In the meanwhile Giovanni knows of no greater enjoyment than to read in this, his precious book, from which he daily learns to appreciate more and more fully that mercy which has delivered him from the chains of Romish error and superstition, and has taught him to "WORSHIP GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH." For we cannot please God in outward forms and useless ceremonies, nor can they satisfy the craving of our own souls, but, as the Lord said to the woman of Samaria in John iv. 23, 24, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."



THE BIBLE!

“Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name.”

Psalm cxxxviii. 2.

WHAT must I think, or what believe,
And what must now my refuge be?
On every side they would deceive,
And take God's blessed word from me:
And yet man's life is pain and woe,
In this his pilgrimage below.

One makes a pen to suit his hand,
Applies the knife, now here, now there;
But that God's Word, who all things planned,
Should be so handled anywhere,
Is that indeed which should surprise
An age like this, reputed wise.

The Book of books, th' Eternal Word,
Which God's own Spirit gave to me,
Is, in these times, by ways unheard,
Attack'd by infidelity ;
And Satan's craft, in this our age,
Obtains more conquests than his rage.

For boasted reason sits enthroned,
And intellect's pretensions high
Have well-nigh Deity disowned,
And hurled defiance at the sky ;
Planting their shafts of wit and sense
Against Thy truth, Omnipotence !

Oh ! if what these '*Enlightened*' say,
About my hope in God most just ;
And they could reason all away
My shelter, confidence, and trust ;
And make God's Word a seeming lie,
And revelation quite deny !

What must I think, what must I do,
For peace or comfort anywhere?
If what the Sceptic says is true,
I've trusted visions light as air.
If Moses wrote untruths on earth,
What can his song* in heaven be worth?

Away, deceivers! mark it well,
Ye boast a mission pure and wise;
It needs no skill or wit to tell,
Nor should it cause the least surprise,
That Satan, who man's ruin sought,
Would Revelation set at nought.

The Bible teaches man to fear
The very God who gave him breath;
To love his neighbour far and near;
Commands the conscience, "Thus God saith!"
Tells of man's ruin to his face,
And shews a remedy in grace.

* Rev. xv. 3.

Thrice welcome is my precious Book!—

My Bible!—thousand-fold more dear!—

It bids me hope, and upward look

To regions pure, and bright, and clear;

Where the redeem'd walk in and out,

Without a conflict or a doubt.

And for believers there is rest,—

A long eternal Sabbath-day;

Secure in Jesus, fully blest,

Himself the Light, the Life, the Way;

There shall we hear our God proclaim

His Word is higher than His Name.



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