

Before Governors and Kings

A Beautiful, Biblical, Inspired Statement of the Plan of Salvation, from The Youth's Instructor

A Circassian nobleman in Constantinople during Sultan Hamid's time was banished by that ruler to Amasia, since it was feared that the nobleman who had studied in French universities was tainted with the revolutionary ideas of the "Young Turks." He was made governor, or vali, of Amasia, and later governor of Van.

Sir Ahmed was an autocratic ruler, and while foreigners heretofore had been shown great consideration, he brought to light an old Mohammedan ruling that permitted a foreigner to live undisturbed in the country for one year; but at the end of this time he must embrace the Mohammedan religion, leave the country, or become a slave and pay tribute. Dr. Clarence D. Ussher was a medical missionary in that province at the time Sir Ahmed made the tyrannical announcement, that in accordance with this law, he would deport the American doctor and close the foreign hospital and schools. He would, however, first give the doctor and his associates a chance to acknowledge allegiance to the Mohammedan faith.

It was at the time of year when the Moslems fast for one month from sunrise to sunset. On the fifteenth day of this month "infidels," all non-Mohammedans, are invited to a great feast, and given opportunity to confess their conversion to the Islam faith.

Dr. Ussher gives the following account of such a banquet and its results:

"Sir Ahmed sat at the head of a long table, Dr. Reynolds was at his right, and next to him a Chaldean Catholic bishop. The writer was at the vali's left, and around the table were Catholic priests and Turkish officers.

"After we had feasted on a delicious thirteen-course dinner, a sweet and a meat served alternately, each dish a separate course, the vali opened the religious conversation by addressing the black-and-crimson-robed bishop:

"My Lord Bishop, will you kindly tell me what you think I must do to enter paradise?"

"Your Excellency," replied the bishop, "if you will permit me, I believe that God, for Jesus Christ's sake, pardons my sins and will receive me into paradise."

"No, sir," said Sir Ahmed; "I cannot accept that, for I believe God to be absolutely just and righteous and one who is absolutely just cannot show favoritism. I am vali here, and my power is practically absolute; you might have a friend in prison for debt to the government (Turkish law imprisons a debtor until his debt be paid); you might come to me and say, 'My friend is in prison for debt which he can never pay; I beg you for my sake to pardon and release him.' I am a man; I might not want to hurt your feelings or deny you anything as my friend; I might pardon him; but if I did so, I should be wronging the whole people. If God can do that kind of thing, he is no more righteous than I am; I cannot believe that of him."

"I thought Sir Ahmed's answer a good one and was interested to see how the

bishop would reply. But he said not a word more, and I began to realize that this was one of the most critical moments of my life. Here was my religion on trial before Islam; the vali had asked a perfectly fair question, the most important question any man could ask, practically, 'What must I do to be saved?' and it was up to Christianity to give him a satisfactory reply. If it could not, it was not worth while as a religion. What could the bishop have said?"

"I had got so far in my thought when Sir Ahmed, speaking loudly, as if to the far end of the table, but with his eyes turned slightly toward me, said, 'Dr. Ussher, what do you say?' I did not know what to say, but I remembered the promise of Christ himself, 'Before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake . . . but when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak;' and I prayed with all my heart, 'O God, give me an answer.' Without a moment's hesitation I replied, and the answer came so distinctly as an answer to the prayer and was so far beyond what I alone was capable of saying that I feel it a duty to put it on record:

"Your Excellency, if you will permit me, I will use your own illustration; I will make a little change in it. I will call you the king; you have a son who is a friend of mine and loves me; I am in prison for a debt to the government on which I cannot pay one in a thousand. Your son comes to you and says, 'Father, my friend is in prison for debt; can you not pardon and release him?' You reply, 'My son, I too love him and do not want him to be in prison;

but I cannot pardon him, for if I did I should be wronging the whole people. I must treat all alike." "Well, father, will you let me pay his debt and he go free?" "Yes, my son, if he will accept it, I will not only let you pay the debt, but I will participate with you."

"The son, without waiting to ask whether I accept or not, goes at once to the proper office, pays the debt, and it is marked on the books that my debt is paid. He receives a receipt upon which is the government seal stating that my debt is paid, and now I am free. But I do not know it. Then he comes to the prison with the receipt and says, "Rise, brother, you are free; your debt is paid, I have paid it."

"I may take one of three courses. I may draw myself up haughtily and say, "No, I will not accept it, I will not be under obligation to any one!" forgetting that, being in debt, I am already under obligation, and this would be but a shifting of the obligation. Should I do this, I would unnecessarily wound one who for love of me has already made a great sacrifice which cannot be taken back. It is on record that my debt is, not that it will be, paid; to refuse would be unworthy of me.

"But I might sit moping, with my head in my hands, and say, "I wish it were so! But I cannot believe it." "But I tell you it is so; see, here is the receipt. Get out of prison and test it," he might say. "No, I dare not; the police might find me and take me back to greater shame!"

"Should he force me from the prison, how would I behave? Not believing in my heart that I was free, I would look sharply this way and that in the street, lest a policeman might see me; should I escape to my

house, I would not dare go near the door nor window lest some one see my shadow and betray me to the police, and imprisonment in my house would be worse than imprisonment in the prison. Without faith, or belief, in the heart there is no liberty. This, too would be ungrateful.

"The third thing I might do and ought to do, when he tells me he has paid my debt and I am free, is to fall at his feet and say, "I thank you. I have nothing to give in return,"—since my pennies to his pounds would be an insult,—"but I shall endeavor by my life to show my thanks."

"Then I would go out of prison, as they did on Liberty Day when Abdul Hamid was deposed and all the prisons were thrown open; every man was free; men who were sentenced to be hanged, those who were imprisoned for life, or were confined, hopeless, for debt, rushed into the street shouting "Azad! Azad!" (Free! Free!) It would be joy to me to tell every one that I was free and who set me free.

"But this is not all: Instead of letting me return to my hovel where there is nothing but poverty, he takes me to his beautiful home. There he gives me the hamam (Turkish bath), the most thorough cleansing known. My prison clothes with all their filth are thrown into the fire, and that is the end of my past life. Then he brings me his own beautiful garments, of colored broadcloth and silk, and, clothed as a prince, he brings me to you, O king, and says, "Father, this is my brother!" and you say, "Come, my son, from this day you are my son. You shall take my name upon you: I will intrust it to you and you will honor it. In my name you shall go in and out; all that I have is yours; you shall share it with your elder brother."

"'This,' I said, 'is as I understand Christianity. God is the King. Jesus Christ, his Son, paid my debt and yours, too,—yours just as much as mine. I believe it and know I am free; if you believe it, it will mean as much to you as it does to me.

"'Now,' I said, 'What will be my attitude toward the Prince? I see him coming down one of the narrow streets on horseback; some one has dumped a load of firewood in the street, filling it up; he cannot pass, what shall I do? Wait until he comes, and say, "What will you give me to remove this obstruction from your way?" Or will I not, as soon as I see him coming, set to work with all my might to remove the obstruction, and then, when he passes, step aside and salute him with joy, glad that I have been able to do something to show my gratitude for what he has done for me? If he should offer to pay me, I would say, "No, I did not do it for pay. I rejoice that I can do something to show my appreciation of what you have already done for me."'

"'So!' said the vali, knitting his brow; 'and do you mean to tell me that the hospital and schools you have here are to show your gratitude to God for something he has already done for you, and not for the purpose of winning some new favor from God?'

"'Yes, sir, exactly.'

"'Well, I had not thought of it so before.'

"'There were no more threats of deportation, and before a great while the Turks of Van made complaint to Constantinople that the vali was too friendly with the Christians. He was removed from his position, but being a man of great power and ability, he rose again and became vali of the most important province in Turkey. When the

order was given from Constantinople to deport and destroy the Armenians, he refused absolutely to obey. He gave up a very large salary and allowed himself and his family to be banished and their lives endangered. The last I heard of him he was living on a farm in the interior of Turkey near Tokat, where Henry Martin died. I have wondered sometimes how many of us who profess to be Christians would have measured up to the standard of that man who had never made any profession of faith in Christ. If we believe that Jesus the Christ paid our debt on Calvary, not that he is going to pay it on the judgment day or at some future time, does it not behoove us to ask ourselves, Are we showing our thanks by our lives?'

Why the Penalty Must Be Paid

In further explanation of why pardon could not be obtained without payment of the debt, the following parable, based on facts, is appended to illustrate this important truth.

It is twilight and the governor of a great American state with his only son, his private secretary, is about to leave his office, when there is a gentle knock at the door, which, when opened, reveals the frail form of a widowed mother whose sorrowing face pleads piteously through a tear-stained veil.

Touched by the evidence before him of the woes of womanhood, the kind-hearted governor, with that frankness and freedom characteristic of western life, extends his hand and with reassuring tenderness in his tones, says, "Come in, mother, take this easy chair. And now what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?'

"O, give me the life of my son, my only son; my poor sinning son. O, give me the life of my son! He is the only child of his widowed mother. O, save his life from the hangman's

hand, lest I go desolate, crushed, childless, into the grave."

The governor, with mingled pity and perplexity pictured on his face—for he now realizes that he is in the presence of the mother of a murderer who is to be hanged on the morrow, —after a painful pause, speaks, but with pleading tenderness:

"But, mother, did not your son have a fair, impartial trial? Was he not justly convicted, and—now be honest—do you not yourself believe that he committed the crime for which he has been sentenced to die?"

"O, governor, I am not asking for justice, I am pleading for mercy. O, give me the life of my wayward, sinning boy."

"But mother, is not the law which punishes murder a good law? and must it not be enforced for the safety of the people, and preservation of the government? Do you want the law abolished, or what would be the same thing, do you want it to remain unenforced in order to save your son? Do you not see that if the law was abolished, only anarchy would follow? Can you not see this, mother?"

"O, yes, I see it; I understand it all. The law is good and ought to be, and must be enforced, but he is my only son, my only child. I cannot; O, I cannot return to that dreary cottage, a desolate, childless widow. O, give me the life of my son, my only son!"

"How, mother? Tell me how."

"It is so easy, governor. Take your pen and write a pardon for him, and stamp it with the seal of state, and I can take that bit of paper and go to the prison, and with it pass through the iron gates, and with it I can open the door of that cell which holds my son, and with it I can save his life. O, it will cost you nothing to write it, while to withhold it will cost me my all! O, grant a widow's petition and pardon my son!"

"Yes, mother, it is easy to write a pardon; but if I pardon all who are convicted of crime, we might as well have no law, for the criminals would soon learn that were they detected in their crimes,—were they convicted and sentenced to pay the penalty,—all they would need to do would be to petition the governor and obtain pardon. Can you not see that to pardon all law-breakers would make void the law and introduce anarchy as surely as to abolish the law?"

"Yes, I can understand it all. But is there no way to save my son, my only son? Must he perish, and I return alone? Must I live and die childless and desolate? O, my son, my son! Would God I could die for you, my son, my son!"

The mother's prayer is prayed, her strength is spent, and she now sits in silence, the silence of despair.

This is as far as we can carry the parable with a foundation in fact. But we will carry it further.

At length the governor's son, who has been a silent listener to the pathetic pleadings of the mother, and the faultless infallible reasoning of his father's replies, now breaks the oppressive silence with hopeful words:

"Father, I have a plan whereby you can not only save this mother her son, but at the same time establish and magnify the law."

"But how, my son?"

"Write the pardon for which the mother pleads, and at the same time write an order committing me as a substitute for the son, to the same cell; and when the death watch is passed and the hour of execution is called, I will answer to the name of the widow's son, and die in his stead. When the people hear of it, they will with one voice exclaim 'Behold! how the governor loved the widow's wayward son;' and in the next breath they will cry,

"In what high esteem he holds the law! Rather than lessen in the least its just claims on the life of the lawless, he has enforced it to the letter on the life of his only son. He saved the widow's son and magnified the law."

It will not be necessary to make an extended application of this plain parable to the plan of salvation. The cross magnifies the law of God and love of God to infinite heights. And every soul that has measured the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of the love of God in Christ Jesus as revealed at Calvary, has felt to exclaim: "Behold how the Father loved the sinners of earth; rather than see them perish, He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die under their curse. And behold how highly He held the royal law! Rather than lessen the seriousness of sin, by passing by the penalty of the law, He has executed it to the last letter upon His only begotten Son. He has magnified the majesty of the law and the love of the law-giver."

It now lies with the father to decide whether he will make the sacrifice. He sees the science of state in the suggestion of his son, but the staggering price to be paid!

But he pays the price. The pardon is granted and the criminal is free. The warrant is written and the son, a substitute, stands at the cell of the pardoned sinner. Will the prisoner accept the substitute? The governor's son unbars the door and passes into the presence of the pardoned man, and places in his hand the pardon, saying as he does it:

"You are my father's freed son, he has paid for your life; I am his prisoner, the price he has paid. You are his son. I am the criminal. Your prison garb is mine, and my garments are yours. Your tarnished name is mine, and my father's honored name is yours. Take them and go free. I have taken your place

with its penalty, and I will pay the price on the morrow."

The widow's son stands surprised and staggered. He reads the pardon. He listens in silence to the statement of his substitute; then with grinding teeth to subdue into silence the voice of a long lost chord in his crime-calloused heart, he says, with firmness of tone:

"I thank you for the kindness you have shown me. My heart is calloused with many crimes, but I would have you know that I can still recognize so marvelous a manifestation of unselfish love. But I cannot accept it. I will answer the hangman's call myself and let this crime-stained life atone with its own blood. I cannot accept freedom on the terms you offer."

"But why not? Are not the terms all you could desire? What more could you ask?"

"O, my friend, I must have more. You are asking me to place a freeman's frock on a bondman's back. If I buttoned that coat over this brutal breast it will not be a fortnight before I will be back to this cell, having stained the coat with freshwrought crimes. I must have more. If I take your father's name with my frightful nature it will be a farce, and I will but foul your father's fame, and find myself, before a fortnight, again in fetters. If you could give me your heart when you give me your coat,—if you could give me your nature when you give me your name, then there would be hope. But to ask me to button that stainless coat over this stony heart, to ask me to carry an honored name above a crime-stained nature, is but to put a freeman's frock on a bondman's back. I must have more."

Here the curtain falls upon the scene of the parable, for the governor's son could not transmit his character with his clothes. But thank the Lord, Christ comes to the prison

cell with more than a pardon for the past. No man can meet Him with the objection of the widow's son. No man can refuse the pardon on the ground that he must carry a freeman's name with a bondman's nature. God never gives to a Jacob a change of name without giving him at the same time a change of nature.

He does not ask man to take the new label without the new life.

"A new heart will I give you; and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Eze. 36:26, 27. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people." Heb. 8:10.

"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ, liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me." Gal. 2:20 R.V.

No, the glorious gospel of the blessed God does not ask men to place a freeman's frock on a bondman's back; but with the new name it gives the new nature; with the new linen garment the new gift of life. And the presence of the life of God means the presence of the law of God. Any gospel, therefore, whose salvation stops short of fulfilling or doing the righteousness of the law in the life of the redeemed man by means of the indwelling Christ, is not the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

"Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay we establish the law." Rom. 3:31. R.V.