

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

*CONDUCTED BY CLERGYMEN AND LAYMEN
OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

—•—
VOL. XI.
—•—

LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW
1885

ART. II.—A VILLAGE BIBLE-CLASS FOR MEN.

“WELL, all I can say is, there's a deal done for they women, but there's precious little done for we men.” The speaker was a rough-looking working-man, standing amongst a number of others, at the corner of a street in a country town. The remark was overheard by a lady, who, accompanied by a number of women, was passing by, on her way to a tea, given to her Mothers' Meeting.

The words were bitterly and roughly spoken; but do they not contain a well-merited reproach? “We are verily guilty concerning our brothers.” Meetings for women, classes for older boys and girls, Sunday schools for children, are all held in every well-organized parish; but where are the men? What is done to reach them?

As the Bishop of Bedford truly said, in speaking of Mission work in East London: “There is a danger of our work becoming too feminine; we want to reach the strong, eager, earnest men.”

The means hitherto used to reach them have been those of indirect, rather than direct influence. Their children are taught and cared for, their wives are visited diligently, generally at a time in which their husbands are at work away from home. What is the consequence of this? Our congregations are often chiefly composed of women and children, with a sprinkling of young men who may possibly belong to a class, or to the choir; or of old men, “past their work,” who, as life's eventide draws on, have more time to think of the life of the world to come, as we believe many do, and the *rest* of the Home beyond the grave. But our strong, middle-aged men, who are in the midst of the struggle for life, and who stand in the thickest of the fight, surrounded with this world's temptations, and weighed down by its many cares—where are they? Do they not need the help of personal sympathy, of an encouraging word, of the assurance of a friend's interest in them, just as much as their wives and their children? Surely those who bear the burden and heat of the day, who have little to remind them of God and of higher things, need, even more than others, the teaching which will help them to live, not for this world alone, but for “the life that knows no ending.”

This thought had long been in my mind, and I had often thought over ways of making the acquaintance and winning the confidence of our working-men; but the means of carrying out such a desire seemed surrounded with insuperable difficulties.

If I met any of them on the roads, or in the fields, they would touch their hats respectfully, saying "Good-morning," or "Good-evening," in reply to my salutations; but if I ventured upon any further advances in conversation, the only response was in monosyllables.

If I called at a house where a man was ill, or out of work, my attempts at any intercourse were met by a hasty retreat to the garden, or the back kitchen; or if he was too ill to escape, my remarks to him were usually answered by a wife or daughter. I knew the older boys, and the young men of the village; they attended my classes, and responded gratefully to all that was done for them: but the older men remained as far as ever from any kindly influence, and the problem of how to meet them remained still unsolved.

And yet as I read the account of Miss Marsh's noble work amongst our navvies, of what Miss Robinson had done at Portsmouth for our soldiers, and Miss Weston for our sailors, I could not but think that a lady ought to be able to win her way into the hearts of our country labourers and artisans, who, after all, are of the same rank in life, and brought up amongst the same surroundings.

Whilst I was still revolving in my mind the possible solution of this problem, the scene of action was suddenly changed, and I hoped to find new surroundings more favourable for carrying out my project.

My father was presented to a living in Hampshire, a picturesque little country village, where we found the people kindly disposed towards us. Owing to the great age of the former incumbent, but little church work had been done amongst them, and they were disposed to welcome every effort made for their good. Large congregations attended the hearty services in the little church, the most remarkable feature being the numbers of men of every age who came. This being the case, I much hoped to become better acquainted with the working-men of the place, and to organize some means of reaching them personally.

Accordingly, having started a class for reading the Bible and singing hymns, for the young men and older boys, I sent a message by them to any men of their acquaintance, saying that I hoped to form a class of the same description for them, and should be glad to see them during the winter, on one evening in the week. The reply brought by my messengers was certainly an unexpected one. "Please, miss, they say they're much obliged to you for thinking about them, but they're not a-coming. They say they've been let alone so long, they'd rather be let alone a bit longer." This was by no means encouraging. I was not disheartened, however, but simply felt

that the way was not open at present, and that I must wait until it became clearer.

The next winter I was away from home, but the following one I determined to make another attempt.

I wrote a number of circulars, saying that a Bible-class for men would be held at the Rectory, every Tuesday evening, at eight o'clock, and that I should be very glad to see all who wished to attend. These notices I distributed personally to all the men I knew, or left them at their houses with their wives. All preparations were made, and on the following Tuesday evening I anxiously awaited their arrival.

Again, however, I was doomed to disappointment: only three came, consisting of our coachman, under-gardener, and a rough-looking young man, a stranger to me, who informed me he had lately come to work in the village, and hearing I was going to have a night-school every Tuesday, had come to attend it, "as he wished to get on with his learning." The following week I hoped our members would increase, but, on the contrary, the number was less. The second night only two appeared, and on the third week only one. Such being the case, I dissolved the class for the winter, and felt again that my efforts were not as yet to be crowned with success.

On inquiry, I found that two causes had mainly contributed to their non-appearance. The first was a fear that the word "class" implied that "they would have to read round their verses;" and as many could not read at all they naturally feared this ordeal. The second reason was, that "they felt too shy to come up to the Rectory;" and I heard afterwards that they would have come had the class been held in the reading-room or in the schoolroom.

When the following winter came, I determined to profit by this experience, and to proceed on a new plan:

I told the women belonging to our Mothers' Meeting, that a meeting for men would be held one evening in each week at the reading-room, and asked them earnestly to induce their husbands and sons to attend. This they promised to do, and I hoped much from their influence. I prayed earnestly that this third attempt might succeed, as I had prayed for each previous one. Success had not hitherto been granted; would it be so, or not, this time? If not, I determined to relinquish my long-cherished desire to reach our working-men, feeling that God had thus shown me clearly that I was not to be allowed to work for Him in this way.

The evening came at last. I entered the reading-room at eight o'clock, and, much to my delight, saw five men awaiting me. These were soon joined by two others, so that we had

seven to begin with, and my heart was full of thankfulness for this answer to my prayers. The men, I now hoped, were reached at last.

I spoke a few words welcoming them, and saying how glad I was to see them, and how much I hoped they would try to bring in others, to which they cordially responded. Then we sang two hymns, after which I offered a short prayer, asking for the blessing of God upon our first little meeting, and upon all those who were present. After this we took our Bibles, and found several texts upon "the Love of God," the subject I had chosen for that evening. I spoke a few simple and earnest words upon it, telling a short story as an illustration of the subject, to all of which they listened with the deepest interest and attention. When this was ended we sang another hymn, and after another short prayer we concluded with the Lord's Prayer, the whole lasting exactly an hour.

"We'll come again," they all said, as I wished them "Good-night;" and they kept their promise.

Two of the men present were unknown to me. One I asked to walk home with me, and I found he was a soldier in the Army Reserve, and had lately come to work in the village—a fine-looking, well-drilled young man, with good manners, who had been to Abyssinia during the war there. The other was of a very different stamp, and one of the roughest-looking men I had as yet met with. I found he was a well-known character, whose feats of hard work, hard drinking, and hard swearing were notorious. At one time he had been a navvy, and since then he had travelled about the country, never staying long in one place, and living the wildest possible life wherever he went. Poor fellow! many thought he "hadn't ought" to come to a lady's class; but, on the contrary, when I found out what sort of character he was I felt deeply thankful, and hoped that the Good Shepherd had touched the heart of this poor wandering sheep, and awakened in his rough sinful heart a desire to return to the Fold.

A few days later I called at the house in which this man was lodging, and was told by the woman in charge that he had come home much impressed by what he had heard at the class, and saying, that "if only he could see the lady, and have a talk with her, he believed she would help him to lead a better life." I left a message, asking him to come and see me that very evening, or any other evening that might suit him better. He did not appear, however; and, on inquiry, I found that he had once or twice started to come, but, having entered the public-house on his way, had spent the evening there, never returning till late at night, and then in such a state of intoxication that his conduct and language had

shocked even those who were most accustomed to it. Such conduct was certainly not encouraging; but still I hoped that the good impressions might not fade away altogether. My hopes were about to be fulfilled sooner than I had expected, for one night he arrived and asked to speak to me. I welcomed him gladly, and told him how anxious I was to help him, if he wished to forsake his old manner of life and become a different man.

"That's just what I've come here for," he replied. "I know you'd help me if you could; and I believe you can. I'm pretty nigh tired of the life I've led; I'm that miserable and wretched I don't know what to do. I've thought of putting an end to myself many a time; and I'll do it yet, unless something comes to change me."

He then told me the story of his life: one of the darkest, saddest stories I ever heard of sin, and suffering, and wrong. He concealed nothing, and did not in any way try to excuse his conduct, though he said but little of the one who, as I afterwards heard from others, had cruelly wronged and deceived him. When his story was ended, I spoke a few words of sympathy, assuring him also of the pardon that awaited him from the loving Father, Who is ever ready to welcome His erring child, and entreating him to repent of his sinful life. I also urged him to take the Temperance Pledge, as a means of breaking off from the sin which was his ruin.

He thanked me heartily for all I said, and added: "I knew it would make me a different man altogether if I could keep from drink; but if I make a promise I stick to it, so I won't make it lightly. It's a great deal you're asking me to give up, but I'll take a week to consider of it, and I'll let you know." We then knelt down together, and I prayed earnestly that he might be given strength to break off from his evil habits, and to give his heart to God.

A week later he returned, saying he had made up his mind to take the pledge, and to keep it with God's help. From that time he became a changed character. In spite of constant and bitter persecution and ridicule from his old companions, he kept his pledge; he attended my class regularly, bringing others with him; he came to church, which he had never done before; and during the Advent services, held one evening in the week, he might be seen bringing a number of his "mates" into a seat (men who rarely entered any place of worship), and then sitting down happy and proud beside them. "And it's not only outwardly he's changed," remarked his employer one day to me, "it's a change right through. Why, his language at work used to be something awful; but from that night he took the pledge, there's never a word

passed his lips that you would be ashamed to hear." His influence in the cause of Temperance was very great; and during that winter he brought twelve men to me to take the pledge.

"Will he persevere to the end?" I asked of one of the men with whom he worked—an earnest, devoted man; "or will it last only for a time?" "Never you fear, miss," was the reply; "he's one of those for whom the Saviour prayed, 'Holy Father, keep through Thine Own Name those whom Thou hast given Me;' and surely we can trust him to that care."

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation;" and never did I see a more striking instance of the truth of these words. "I just try to think of God always," he said to me once, "and to pray to Him whenever I feel tempted to fall back, for I know but for Him I'd just be as bad as ever again. I'll tell you what it is, miss; it just seems to me as if you'd taken me up, and laid me in the Saviour's Arms, and He's kept me, and *took care* of me ever since."

From that time onwards the class continued steadily to increase. We began with seven members, but before the winter was over forty-two different men had attended it; some coming merely out of curiosity to see what it was like, and not appearing again; others, now and then, when they had nothing better to do; but the greater number continued regular in their attendance until in the spring the lighter evenings and later hours of work prevented them from coming any longer. One interesting feature connected with the work, was the way in which all ages and all ranks came together. Employers of labour and well-educated artisans would sit side by side with carters and labourers who could not read, and whose intellects were of the lowest possible description. Old grey-haired men, whose days were nearly ended, came with the young and strong whose life seemed but just beginning.

"I only wish it was every night," many said to me. "It does seem to help us on so in the right way; and when there's so much to pull us the wrong way, it seems hard there should be only Sundays and Tuesday evenings to help us."

"I like coming," a tall strong young labourer said to me, "for it seems to make religion and the Bible so plain. You see, I'm no scholar, and it's often difficult for me to understand things; but when I come to our meetings, it seems all so simple and plain that I can understand it right well."

Such were some of the encouragements; but, on the other hand, many would come, and remain, as far as one could see, utterly untouched by what they heard. Some of these would go to the public-house, and ridicule the meeting and those who attended it. Others would attend regularly, but their

lives continued as careless as ever. "It's no use for them to go," one of my men said to me, "and speak one word to God, while they come out and speak seven for the devil. They take one step towards heaven, and, after that, ever so many more towards hell. That does more harm than good; it just brings discredit on God's work." Again and again I was reminded sadly enough of the Parable of the Sower:

Those by the wayside are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

My great object was to become individually acquainted with each of the men, and, through knowing them personally, become better able to understand their lives, their trials, and temptations. Each evening, when the class was over, I asked one of them to accompany me home, and to carry my little basket of books, etc. In this way I attained my object; for a *tête-à-tête* walk on a dark winter's night, or in the moonlight, was a favourable opportunity for winning their confidence. The personal intercourse with a lady—to many of them I was the first they had ever spoken to—seemed to bring out the higher and better part of their natures. "We men like a lady to come among us," one of them said to me one evening; "it does us more good, and has far more influence with us, than a man would have. It seems to call out all that is best and noblest in a man's nature."

For my own part, I frequently felt that I learnt more from them than I could even teach. When a working-man, to use his own expression, "gives his heart to the Lord," there is no limit to the earnestness and devotion which such a gift entails. Religion is a great reality to him. He is exposed to persecution and ridicule, of which we know nothing in our more shielded lives, where a certain amount of the outward observance of religion seems to be required from all. He is frequently taunted with "setting up to be a saint," and told that he is no better than other people. His past life is perpetually brought forward against him, with the plain speaking so usual amongst the working-classes, where regard for each other's feelings is less considered than in a higher rank. His old friends and nearest relations frequently turn against him, for it is uncomfortable to have amongst them one whose standard of right and wrong differs widely from their own; and every hindrance to doing right is continually placed in his way.

"I can't have you coming in here all Sunday, with such dirty boots," a woman I knew remarked to her husband. "What do you want to be going to church for so often, and teaching in that Sunday-school? Why can't you bide at

home like other men, and not be coming in and out when I've made my kitchen clean and tidy of a Saturday night?"

Such a complaint was never heard when her husband had formerly gone in and out of the public-house; but as she never went to any place of worship herself, she objected to her husband "turning pious," as she expressed it. For some time he persevered bravely; but at last he could stand it no longer; and now, alas! he is leading as careless a life as his wife could possibly wish.

And yet, many men make a firm and brave stand, against constant persecution, and fight a good fight, unknown to all but God.

"There are martyrs still, in these days," I remarked to one of my men, when we were speaking of another, who had manfully resisted temptation under very trying circumstances.

"That there are, miss," he replied heartily. "You've little idea what persecution we working-men have to go through for Christ's sake. I've been persecuted like anything, and I hope I've not had the last of it: it makes one feel what Christ is, and how very near He is to help us. I'd gladly die for Him, that I would. It's true enough, that text, 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household.' Why, not long ago, at home, my relations tried all they could to tempt me to do something that was wrong. I refused. 'Then you're a fool,' they said. 'Yes,' said I, 'and I'm not ashamed to be called a fool for Christ's sake.'"

Surely those who make so brave a stand for right should have all the help we can give them, to strengthen them to persevere. I have known men walk many miles all through the dark winter nights, to attend my class, after a long hard day's work, because, they said, "We've so much to pull us back on the wrong side, that it helps us to meet together to hear of God and heavenly things."

Many of their histories with which I became acquainted were very strange, with thrilling incidents of adventure; while others were touching and sad beyond description, struggles with besetting sins, fierce temptations, frequent fails, as well as hand-to-hand fights with poverty and want.

The second year our numbers increased so rapidly that we were obliged to leave the reading-room, and move to the larger schoolroom. It was a sight to fill one's heart with thankfulness to see the men come crowding in, with eager happy faces, especially when they proudly brought in new-comers, with the introduction, "We knew how glad you'd be to see them, miss."

One new feature in the work of our second winter, was the request made by several of the more earnest-minded men that

they might stay behind when the meeting was over and join together in prayer for a blessing on our work. At first this proposal made me anxious, as I feared it might lead to spiritual pride on one hand, and to hypocrisy on the other. I dreaded lest several of the men might bring discredit on it by the inconsistency of their lives. I consulted, however, several who had far greater experience than myself in such matters, and they all assured me that with due care my fears would prove to be unfounded. Such after-meetings for prayer were carried on in many places, and much blessing was found to result from them. Accordingly I consented, and asked any of the men who wished to do so to remain behind and join me in earnest prayer for the help and blessing we so much needed from God. Several did so, upright, true-hearted men, who had given their hearts and lives to God and to His service. Their heartfelt, earnest prayers were very simple and real, and I felt greatly strengthened by the feeling that I had such men on my side to help me in God's work. Such prayers could not but bring a blessing.

To my surprise, however, I found that this act had created much indignation and jealousy among many of the other men. "What did the likes of them want, with setting themselves up to pray, as if they were better than other people?" they asked indignantly. "They weren't coming to the meeting if some were to stay behind and make out they were better than their neighbours." In fact this little prayer-meeting threatened to destroy our harmony. Several of the men urged me to give it up, or else they threatened not to come any longer; but I assured them I could not do this, once it had begun, and begged them to reconsider their determination.

The storm fortunately soon quieted down; some few, who had never come very regularly, left and did not return; while others left for a time, but soon came back, and have attended constantly ever since.

I have found this little after-meeting of the greatest possible use for deepening the spiritual life of those already in earnest. Those who remain behind first sing a hymn, and then we talk over some text, or difficulty in the Christian life, which they bring forward; and in this way one becomes better acquainted with their spiritual needs, and views altogether. Sometimes when those who are known to be leading careless lives have remained, with a desire to become better, it is very touching to hear how one or two of the older men will welcome them in, speaking earnest, manly words of help and encouragement, and assuring them from their own past experience of how they may be brought "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

One evening when I was speaking to them on the great love of God, and the forgiveness of sins, the door opened, and a good-looking, well-dressed young man entered. He was a stranger to me, and after welcoming him amongst us, I went on with my subject, rather thinking that it would not be one of which he would feel the need and the comfort as much as many older men who were present. He listened, however, with the greatest attention. Contrary to my expectations, he remained for the after-meeting, and when we knelt down to pray, to my great surprise he covered his face with his hands, and in broken accents uttered the prayer of the Prodigal: "Father, I have sinned. Forgive me. Help me to come back to Thee. Thou knowest how deeply I have sinned. Forgive me, I entreat Thee, and help me to return to Thy love, and to lead a better life, for the sake of Thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

As he walked home with me afterwards, he told me his history, and acknowledged how deeply he had sinned, and how he longed for pardon and peace, assuring me that the words he had heard had made him long to forsake his sins, and to lead a better life. I heard afterwards that he tried earnestly to become a different character; that no ridicule from his companions, to which he was constantly subjected, would induce him to give up his new course. Formerly when they taunted him with anything, he would reply angrily and lose his temper; but now he bore all patiently, and after a time they ceased to persecute him.

He became a regular attendant at church, not only on Sundays, but during the week-day evening services in Advent and Lent; and he never once missed coming to my class when he could possibly attend. He has now left the place; but when I last heard from him he was going on remarkably well in every way.

Another instance, showing the marvellous way in which God's Holy Spirit can reach the lowest and most degraded, was that of a notorious poacher and drunkard, one of the roughest characters in the place, and who never went to any place of worship. One day my father met him returning from work, and spoke to him kindly; and this, though it did not apparently bear fruit at the time, was the first thing that seemed to touch this poor rough heart. "He spoke to me kindly, he did," he remarked to me later; "and I made up my mind I'd go and hear him some time in church, for he's a good man, he is." He did not carry out this good resolution, however; but one evening, when my class was going on, to my surprise, and the still greater surprise of all present, he appeared, and took his seat among the rest. I happened to

be speaking of the Holy Spirit's influence. I told them a story of a young man who had been turned out roughly from a public-house, after drinking hard and spending all his money there; of how he resolved never to enter one again after such treatment, and of the changed life he was now leading.

My new hearer listened attentively, and after a time the tears might be seen rolling down his rough face, while his coat-sleeve rubbed them off from time to time, fearing that others might see him. He remained for the prayer-meeting, after which one or two of the men spoke to him, and urged him to begin a better life. He then accompanied me home: "I've been the biggest sinner," he said, "that you could find anywhere—I'm well-known for it all about here; but I've just heard something to-night that makes me long to be a better fellow. It just seemed, while you was talking, as if a great light came into my heart, and showed me how downright bad all my life had been. Help me to be better," he added imploringly, "and do you help my lads too. They're bad enough, but it's their father has made them so."

After speaking to him of God's love, and readiness to forgive, and assuring him that I would help him in every way I could, I urged him strongly to take the pledge, as a means of breaking off from his besetting sin. This he promised to do. He took it, and kept it well for a time; but after a while broke it, and could not be induced to join again for fear of his old habit becoming too strong for him. He became a regular attendant at church, however, and at the class. His whole life is different, and his home happier than it has ever been before. Now and then, unfortunately, he still gives way to drink, but, on the whole, he is trying to keep in the right way, and we must wait patiently, knowing that all true spiritual as well as natural growth must be gradual, to be lasting:

First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient.

Such are a few of the instances I have come across during the winter evenings I have spent with the working-men of a country parish. I might give many others, but these will be sufficient to show the ready response they give to any efforts made on their behalf.

The second winter about sixty men attended; and the third winter, now beginning, the numbers are still increasing, several from neighbouring villages walking long distances to be present. In some cases good results are to be seen, but in many others the good seed seems as yet to bring forth no

fruit. Men come week after week, and lead the same careless lives, and pay little or no attention to the words spoken.

But the work is God's, not ours. The Lord of the Harvest sends forth the sower, as well as the reaper; and we believe and are sure that in His own good time He will bless our efforts, and hear our prayers, and will gather into His garner the souls "for whom Christ died."

EMILY C. ORR.



ART. III.—"THE PRINCE OF ABISSINIA."

Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia. By SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D. Being a facsimile reproduction of the First Edition. Two vols. With an Introduction by Dr. JAMES MACAULAY, and a Bibliographical List of Editions of "Rasselas" published in England and elsewhere. Elliot Stock.

MR. DISRAELI'S characteristic phrase, "The Mountains of Rasselas," in his speech on the Abyssinian Expedition, has often been quoted during the last month, in which were held centenary commemorations of the author of "Rasselas," who died December 13, 1784. The centenary of Johnson's death has recalled some of his works from unmerited forgetfulness; but the tale of "Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia," has never ceased to be a favourite. Several English and American editions have appeared in recent years. A facsimile of the first edition, now brought out by Mr. Elliot Stock, will be welcomed by many admirers of Dr. Johnson; it is a literary curiosity of singular interest and merit.

The tale was published in the spring of 1759, and the title-page runs thus:

The Prince of Abissinia. A Tale. In two volumes. Vol. I. London: Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY, in Pall Mall, and W. JOHNSTON, in Ludgate Street. MDCCLIX.

The name of the author, it will be noticed, was not on the title-page, and, according to "The Bibliography of *Rasselas*," which accompanies the work before us, Dr. Johnson's name was not printed on the title-page of the sixth edition, published in 1783. Not, indeed, before a seventh edition was issued, in 1787, did the words "By S. Johnson, LL.D.," enrich the title-page. The fact is curious. Nor is it easy to understand why "Rasselas" was published anonymously. In 1759, Johnson was at the height of his fame. Four years had elapsed