

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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The Company of Two Armies

(The Pastor's Letter March 1973)

My Dear Friends,

Numerous are the lessons that the children of God must endeavour to keep ever before them as they are called to live out their Christian lives upon this earth until the Lord should see fit either to call them one-by-one to be with Himself, or else, to appear in His time-appointed to gather up the remnant of His elect still left upon the earth.

One of the most vital lessons for our souls – which would seem to be always in season – is the remembrance that when a man, or a woman, is born again of the Spirit of God there is implanted within them an entirely new nature which they just didn't possess before, and that, alongside with that new nature, the old nature is left to exist, although not to run rampant as it was able to do before the person's rebirth by the Spirit. The fact that these two opposing factors then come to be operative in the life of a child of God immediately turns that believing life into a veritable battlefield, and the believer in Christ is time and time again forced to emerge from the spiritual onslaughts that such a situation creates to the ever-fresh realisation that there is such a situation in the first place.

The young Bride in the Song of Solomon expressed the sentiment of the Church of Christ for every generation: "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" She asked of Solomon, "as it were, the company of two armies." Even a casual read of the Song of Solomon will show what she was getting at: Solomon was her Bridegroom and steadfast in his love towards her; she was his Bride, but her love very much ebbed and flowed. Yet, in spite of that, Solomon continued to shower his love upon her. In the light of that, what could he possibly "see" in her – "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" because in her own estimation there must have been "two armies" – one eager and willing to love and to obey her faithful Bridegroom, the other, eager

and determined to draw her away and cause her to walk in unfaithfulness.

The picture is all too clear; it is the story of the heart, and the mind, and the life of every believing child of God; for whereas, it is the desire of their hearts to “run after” Christ continuously, nevertheless, they feel their feet dragging and even turning aside into another path which is far from becoming of those who name the Name of the Lord. What is the explanation? There is “the company of two armies.” So that the believer in Christ is not only a “soldier” of Christ but he is a battlefield, as well, where the conflicts for the glory of Christ are so often fought out by these two mighty opposing forces.

The apostle Paul names two of the most active battalions in these two armies in that famous seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans; “I delight in the law of God after the inward man,” he says there, “but I see another law,” he goes on to say, “warring against the law of my mind.” Lined up in full array within the believer’s life – the Law of God; but bristling with the impatience of disobedience – Another Law – stretched out to oppose that Law of God at every wheel and turn. What a discovery that can be to the newly-born child of God. In that first flush of new life, when God implanted the joy of His Word within our hearts and minds, it seemed as though heaven was in us before we were in heaven; the very mention of Christ’s Name was a joy to the soul. And then came a temptation out of the ranks of the Law of Sin; it moved around the heart and mind, it struck home to the soul, a battle ensued, and like the one that raged between Joshua and Amalek, sometimes the Joshua prevailed, and sometimes Amalek prevailed. Then, came that realisation: “I find **another** law.” There was the “company of two armies,” and each would strive for mastery and domination until the final blast of the last trump at the appearing of Christ.

It will do us good to remember who it was that uttered these words, and at what time he uttered them. They were spoken by that, almost unique man, the apostle Paul, the one who was “caught up into the third heaven” where he saw things “unutterable.” And the

time in his life that he found this “other law” so operative was when he would “do good!” “I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me.” It’s when the law of God begins to operate in our lives that the law of sin becomes so active and launches its worst offensives. You endeavour to speak for Christ, and it’s as though a swing from the devil’s broadsword cuts the very tongue right out of your mouth at that precise moment you approach the Word of God very often so that a certain line of reasoning might find rest on the revealed truth of God in the Word, but it’s scarce possible to see because of the dust from the battle even the place of prayer, which ordinarily promises a retreat and a place of refreshing can be turned into a running battle to gain even so much as the concentration of the heart and mind for a few brief minutes. “The company of two armies!” The Law of God and the Law of Sin.

The apostle Paul goes on to show his reactions to the offensives of these two battalions from those two factors that he finds at work in his life; “With the mind,” he says, “I myself serve the law of God; but, with the flesh, the law of sin.” Both armies, as it were, offer “promotion” for good service in the conflict, and the two “natures” now existing within the believing child of God respond to these “enticements” according to their leanings. The new nature – the spiritual nature – within the believer strives after the joys of knowing and keeping the things of the Lord; but, the old nature – the fleshly nature – naturally turns to gratify itself with the rewards that the law of sin can set before it. So the conflict continues.

We can break the two armies down, not only into battalions, as it were, but into regiments, or companies, or patrols, or even individuals, according as to how the fight develops and is waged within each of our individual hearts and lives. There is “Assurance” on the one side, and “Doubt” on the other. At one time it appears to be the most natural thing in the world to put to flight the armies of the alien by standing up and declaring, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth;” while at another, we smell the very courtyards of Doubting Castle itself where Giant Despair loves to parade the spoils of his warfare.

There is “faith” and there is “Sight”, and each is a force that can do exploits, either for our spiritual good, or our spiritual detriment. And there is “the Earthly” and “the Heavenly”, and we might be sure that when the Earthly gets a foothold of advance within us, the “Sight” gains the day, and “Doubt” is soon running up the victory flag on behalf of the old nature.

How vital, then, to constantly remind ourselves that this is the situation that exists within us. To deny it, on the one hand, leads to a form of hypocrisy, where a man or a woman only establishes a “peace peace, where there is no peace;” but to use it as an excuse to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” etc., is to be but a traitor to Him who has called us to be “holy in all manner of conversation.” No, to hold the truth in all practical vitality for our souls is to be truly aware of the situation it presents us with, and to strive to be truly aware of the situation it presents us with, and to strive to feed, and drill, and supply that army of the spiritual man, and to cut-off the lines of supply and communication of the carnal, fully coming to terms with the fact that the struggle is one that we will have for life.

One thing must be uppermost, however; the battle may be waged within the soul, but it is not **for** the soul! That was settled, once and for all, when the great Captain of our salvation entered into “the strong man’s palace” and led out a multitude that no man can number to form them into a people that would learn to “look forth as the morning, clear as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” The Word of God fair rings with the noise of the battle; “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;” “no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath called him to be a soldier.” The toils of the conflict are invariably lightened when we view them in the light of this – that it is to “please him” who has called us to be soldiers – aye, and battlefields, too – that we endure hardness and fight the good fight of faith.

Yours Sincerely,
W.J. Seaton



William Chalmers Burns

(Continued from Edition 92)

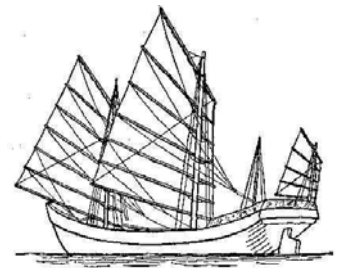
Believing that the time had now come for him to enter another “vineyard” under the direction of the Lord, William Burns once again cast a wistful eye to the great land of China. The days of the awakening in Scotland prior to the Disruption now seemed to have subsided somewhat, and with the need tending more to pastoral ministry, the place of Burns, who had traversed the land bringing revival in his wake, called for consideration before the Lord. He diligently sought the mind of the Lord in every available means, and at the end of his search ascribed all to the confirmation of the Lord’s direction: “To sovereign grace be the praise,” he wrote, “the endless, unutterable praise.”

The tremendous uprooting involved in moving from the one sphere of labour in “The Land of the Covenant” to the endless miles of the “Mystic East” might have caused a lesser mortal to have shrunk back into the exit of unsuitability; but Burns was undaunted. “The study of Chinese,” he was told, “requires bodies of iron, lungs of brass, eyes of eagles, hearts of the apostles, memories of angels, and lives of Methuselah.” He proved he had all of these in just proportion. “When would you be ready to leave for China?” he was asked by the Mission Board that interviewed him; “Tomorrow,” was the curt reply.

It wasn’t quite like that, of course, and even the few available ships that travelled to Hong Kong were subject to the winds and the waves of the Lord’s disposing, and it was two months before William Burns set sail from Portsmouth for the land of the Lord’s choosing for him.

He was just about to walk into the Scotch Church, Woolwich, to conduct a farewell service when the word arrived that the Mary Bannatyne was ready to leave Portsmouth next morning. He rushed to the railway station, but missed the train to Portsmouth; returned to the church, committed all into the hands of the Lord; preached his sermon, and on arriving at Portsmouth next morning discovered that the sailing had been held up! So, in November 1847, he arrived in the harbour of Hong Kong.

Like so many missionaries before and after him, William Burns experienced that Holy restiveness that continually urged him away from the relative comforts of the great sea ports where so many other missionaries and white people in general had congregated, and after about fourteen months of study in the Chinese language he felt that the time had come for him to move off across the narrow strip and on into mainland China. “You desired that three doors might be opened to me,” he wrote home to his mother, “the door of utterance into the language; the door of access into the country of China; the door of admittance for the Lord’s truth into men’s hearts. The first of these has been opened in an encouraging degree already; and it now remains to seek by prayer and action that the other two doors may be opened also.” They were, indeed, to be opened, but, as William Burns soon discovered, those eastern hearts had been locked up tight for so long with the devil’s bolts that many assaults would be required before the final breach could be made.



He moved off into Canton, and so hard was the work here that William Burns felt hard pressed in making his own calling and election sure. His letters home at this time provide valuable material on the trials of a good missionary of Jesus Christ; how much he needed the Lord in that Christless atmosphere: “What need I have of the Lord of the Sabbath in a Sabbathless land like this,” he wrote, “Oh, that I may not lose my own soul in seeking to save the souls of others.”

The work in Amoy proved to be more fruitful, even though the hearts of the people were as initially hard as those that Burns had encountered in Canton. In Amoy he reckoned that there were six-hundred opium smoking dens, and remarked on how the habit showed itself on the very faces of the men and women of that place. In spite of this, however, the Word of the Lord began to penetrate, and in due course there came the day of great rejoicing when seventeen souls were baptized and formed into the first believing church under the great Scots preacher.

Had any of the congregations of Scotland to whom Burns had ministered during those windswept days of revival come across the great Scottish minister now, it is doubtful if they would have recognised him. Burns had begun to attire himself with the dress of the Chinese to whom the Lord had sent him with the gospel. He had come into contact with Hudson Taylor and both of them had deemed it essential not to show any marked difference in outward things between themselves and the people of the land. One might get away with European dress in the large towns, Burns observed, but one must discard it in the interior or else, "... be gazed at like a gorilla, or an orang-utan!"

The association of Burns with Hudson Taylor was especially blessed to Burns in the work that they entered into in the town of Swatow. A Christian sea captain by the name of Bowers spoke at a prayer meeting in Shanghai when the two men were present, and told of the evil running rampant in that place. After the meeting, the captain exhorted both Burns and Taylor to lay the responsibilities of Swatow upon themselves; "If traders of all nationalities can live there," he told them, "why should not ministers of the gospel?" The two friends were in silence as they returned to their lodgings, but shortly afterwards, Taylor came to Burns and told him that he knew the Lord was directing him to Swatow, but kept holding back because he did not want to part with Burns. But the burden had been laid just as heavily upon the Scot; "This very night," he told Taylor, "I have



accepted the call to Swatow, my only regret being that I realised that it would mean that we must part.”

The only accommodation available to the two friends in Swatow was a single room above an incense shop! This they accepted as the Lord’s provision. The groundwork was hard, and eventually Hudson Taylor had to leave the town for medical care, hoping to return as soon as possible; in fact, they never saw one another again. Burns encountered more obstacles in this branch of his work than in any other, but through the Lord’s grace learnt to overcome these and witness a good confession before men. On one occasion he was arrested and told to bow before the chief magistrate; “Your Excellency,” he told him, “I will render to you the same obeisance as I would to my Sovereign Queen Victoria, humbly on a bended knee, but I will only kneel on both knees to God, the King of Kings.”

But, in spite of the hardness of the soil, and the heat and the toil of the day, the blade and the ear of the work in China began to show through. One of the things that rejoiced the heart of Burns more than anything else was the inauguration by the Amoy church of its own home missionary society; the Chinese church was now turning, unaided from outside sources, to evangelise her own land.



The days of William Chalmers Burns were now drawing to a close, and after a full life to the glory of the Lord, he died in April 1868.

Contrary to the Chinese practice, he ordered that no new clothing was to be bought for his dead body when he passed on, and his few belongings that were brought home after his death showed that he was rich only in those things of another land: “A few sheets of Chinese paper, a Chinese and an English Bible ... a single Chinese dress, and the blue flag of his gospel boat.”



Gleanings In the Psalms

Psalm 51 (Concluded)

Verse 9 “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” David repeats the prayer which he offered in the first verse, “Blot out my transgressions,” but here he enlarges the prayer with the word “**all**”. All “repetitions,” then, are not vain repetitions. Souls in agony have no space to find variety of language: pain has to content itself with monotones. David’s face was ashamed with looking on his sin, and no diverting thoughts could remove it from his memory, so he prays the Lord to do with his sin what he himself could not do. If God hide not His face from our sin, He must hide it from **us** for ever. If He blot not out our sins, He must blot our names out of the book of life.

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 10 “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” David prays the Lord to “create in him a new heart,” and not to correct his old heart. His heart was like an old garment so rotten and tattered that he could make no good of it by patching or piecing, but even must cut it off and receive a new one. Therefore Paul says, “Cast off the old man.” Don’t pick him up and wash him until he is clean, but cast him off, and begin anew.

Henry Smith

Verse 10 “Create in me a clean heart ... “ David uses the word “create” (Hebrew – bara) a word only used to speak of the work of God. The change in David, therefore, could only be wrought by God alone.

Christopher Wordsworth

Verse 11 “Cast me not away from thy presence ...” One of the punishments of sin is that it casts man out from the face of God, and it may let us see how dear bought are the pleasures of sin when a man, in order to enjoy the pleasures of sin deprives himself of the comforting presence of God. David here, for the carnal love of the face of Bathsheba, puts himself in danger of being cast out from before the face of his God. If a man could remember this in all of the devil’s temptations, he would be loth to buy the pleasures of sin at such a price.

William Cowper

Verse 11 “...and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” The words of this verse imply that the Spirit had not altogether been taken away from David, however much His gifts had been temporarily obscured. Upon one point he had fallen into a deadly lethargy, but he was not given over to “a reprobate mind.” It is scarcely conceivable that the rebuke of Nathan the prophet should have operated so easily and so suddenly in arousing him had there been no latent spark of Godliness still remaining. The truth on which we are insisting is an important one, as many learned men have been drawn into the opinion that the Elect, by falling into mortal sin, may lose the Spirit altogether, and be alienated from God. The contrary is clearly declared by Peter, who tells us that the word by which we are born again is an incorruptible seed (1st Peter chapter 1 verse 23); and John is equally explicit in informing us that the Elect are preserved from falling away altogether.

John Calvin

Verse 12 “... uphold me ...” I am tempted to think that now I am an established Christian, and have overcome this or that temptation, I may now venture very near the temptation – nearer than other men. This is a lie of Satan. I may as well speak of gunpowder getting by habit a power to resist fire, so as not to catch the spark. As long as powder is wet it resists the spark, but when it becomes dry it is ready to explode at the first touch. As long as the Spirit dwells in me richly, He deadens me to sin, so that if I am lawfully called to pass through

temptation I may reckon upon God to carry me through. But when the Spirit leaves me, I am like dry gunpowder. Oh, for a sense of this!

Robert Murray McPhayne

Verse 13 “**Then will I teach transgressors thy ways ...**” Every talent received from God should be put to profit, but especially the talent of mercy. Seeing we are vessels of mercy, should not the scent and sweet odour of mercy go from us to others? If two men walking by the way should both fall into one pit, and the one, being escaped out of it, should go his way and forget his neighbour, might it not justly be called a barbarous and inhuman cruelty? We have all fallen into one and same mire of iniquity; since the Lord hath put out His merciful hand to draw us out of this prison of sin, should we refuse to put out our hand to see if possibly we may draw up our brethren with us?

Bishop Cowper

Verse 17

“A broken spirit is to God
a pleasing sacrifice:
A broken and a contrite heart,
Lord, thou wilt not despise.”

Metrical Psalms

Hanging the Plumb

On Pulpit and Pew

One feature that apparently characterised both the Ministers and members of the churches in Scotland in a bye-gone age, but which seems to have fallen into some disuse, was the ready repartee that was constantly being exchanged between pulpit and pew. The almost-equal degree of success that was enjoyed by the one in “putting the other right” can be judged from the following anecdotes from “**The Kirk and its Worthies**”.

After Dr. Thomson of Markinch had delivered an impressive discourse on the text, "Look not on the wine when it is red in the cup," two drouthy chieles, on the way home, overhauled the sermon. "What thought ye o't? asked one, by way of introducing the subject. "Deed, Davie," said the other, "I'm mair inclined to criticise the minister than the sermon."

"Ay, and what do ye make o' the minister?" "Oh, just this: I think he's been a gey lad in his day, or he couldna say sae muckle about the bit dram. Davie, my man, take the word of an auld man; he's a slee hand, the minister!"

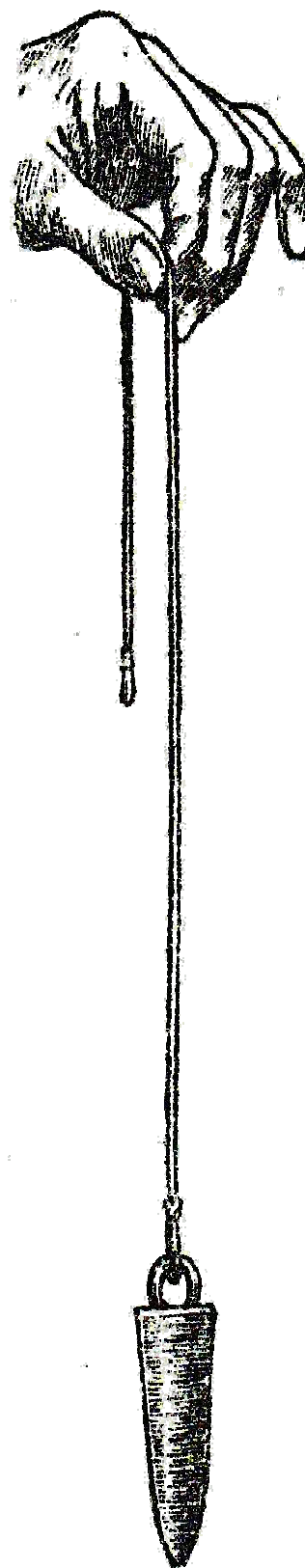
There is a great deal of human nature in the inductive process of reasoning here employed, for it served to render the two worthies impervious to the personal application of the sermon, "Thou art the man!"

Dr. Kidston enjoyed the reputation of being "a hard hitter," and he was worthy of the reputation, as may be gathered from the following dialogue:

"How did he get on the day?" an auld wife was asked on her way home by one who had not been able to be at church.

"How did he get on? He just stood and threw stanes at us, an' never missed with ane o' them. My certie, but yon was preaching!"

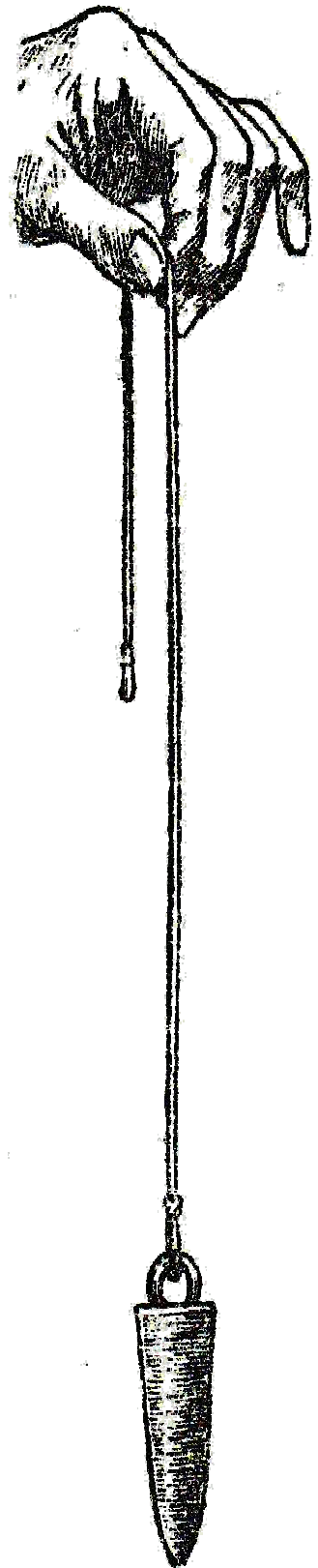
Another description of "Something like preaching" is contained in the enthusiastic



language of a farmer's wife. "My John, yon was something for a body to bring away: nine heads and twenty particulars to ilka head! And such mouthfu's of grand words! Oh man, John, but it was grand, and would do us all muckle guid if we could mind anything o't."

About the beginning of the nineteenth century, there resided in Glasgow a certain James Bell who had a great reputation as a caustic critic of the ministry. He is said to have advised a budding clergyman as follows: "Never begin two days following in the same strain, and if you should happen to be at a loss try to get up a bit greet. If you can do that, your fortun's made. There's anither thing ye might remember wi' advantage in the pulpit – find fault wi' the translation o' the scriptures. Tear't in bits. Then ye'll be considered a second Solomon. Ye might wi' advantage find out a **hidden meaning** in your text; it will, maybe, be easier for you to do that than to find out the real one! Amang a' the books o' the Bible there's yin taken up by a heap o' fools, an' that is the book of Revelation. Be cautious about meddlin' wi' it, for ye may mak' a fool o' yourself. But if ye must meddle wi' it, just tak' a trip up an' doon amang the seven kirks o' Asia; but dinna gang beyond them".

Dr. Risk, of Dalserf, was visited by a deputation from his church who announced that they wanted to "converse" with him. "Upon what subject?" asked the Doctor, who belonged to the old Moderate party in the church. "About your preaching, Doctor." "About my preaching! What do you have to say about that?" "Weel, we dinna think ye tell us enough about renouncing our ain righteousness." "Renouncing your ain righteousness!" exclaimed the



minister, in astonishment, “I never knew that ye had any righteousness to renounce!”

It must have been during a sleepy period in the church that the story is told of a minister who stopped in the middle of his sermon, and addressing one of his hearers personally, asked, “Are ye hearin’ John?” “Ay, I’m hearin’, minister,” came the unexpected reply, “but to very little purpose!”

Different ministers had different ways of tackling this sore subject. Dr. Lawson tried mild remonstrance, and found it wonderfully effective. No angry rebuke did he administer; he simply ceased speaking for a minute, and when the bowed heads were raised and the wondering eyes were “at attention,” the Doctor quietly asked, “Are ye not a strange people? When I speak, ye sleep; and when I cease to speak, ye waken up!”

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

I wonder how many of you know the name of Frances Ridley Havergal. I’m sure some of you may know some of the hymns she wrote, for Frances Ridley Havergal was a hymn-writer.

Have you ever sung, “Who is on the Lord’s side”? or “Golden Harps are sounding”? Well, these and many other great hymns were written by Frances Ridley Havergal, and, in the hymns that she wrote she always loved to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He meant to her.

It wasn't always so, however, boys and girls, for the only thing that Frances Ridley Havergal really seemed to love when she was a little girl was her parents' garden where she used to spend most of her time, looking at the flowers, or sitting under the trees. She knew a great deal about the Bible, and when she was only about eight years of age she could repeat whole chapters of the Bible without making one mistake. But, although she knew the Bible, she didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ as her Saviour, and so, she had no real love for Him, but only for her garden.

One day when young Frances was reading some hymns written by a man called William Cowper, she came across these words –

“My Father made them all.”

She had always believed that God had made the world, and all things in the world, and all the things that grew in her garden. However, the words that struck young Frances Ridley Havergal were the two words at the beginning of the line – “**My Father** made them all.” Even in her young life she began to realise that, although God was her Creator – although He had made all things – still withall, God was not really her “heavenly” Father. Before God could really be her Father, she would have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all her heart.



This she did, boys and girls; and every one who would have God as their real heavenly Father must believe in Christ His Son.

Love,
Mrs Seaton