

The Two Alexanders; or, Delay and Decision.

A Hospital Narrative.

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Chapter 1. — "I'LL THINK ABOUT IT, SIR."

The work of the week was over, and the clock was just striking ten one Saturday night, during the session 1865-6, when, having seen the rest of the patients under my care in certain wards of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, I drew near to the bedside of Alexander S-. He lay in ward -, having been admitted four days previously with unmistakable evidences of consumption. This night I made a more careful examination of his chest than I had before done, and it was doubtless this that drew from him, the moment I had finished, the question

"Well Doctor, what do you think of my case?"

He was a carpenter, a fine, manly fellow of 20, and his calm, intelligent face did not give much evidence of the disease which had wrought frightful ravages in the lungs; however, he had been ill for some time, and I judged was prepared to receive the truth in reply to his query.

"You are pretty bad, I am sorry to say, Alexander," I replied.

"I guessed that, sir; but do you think I shall get better?"

"In this cold climate, I fear there is not much prospect of recovery for you, the only chance appears to me to lie in your getting to some warmer region, such as Australia."

"Well, sir, there is no hope in that quarter," he replied, "for I have no means to take me there, and no friends who could pay my passage. I hope you will do what you can for me here."

"You may rest assured of that," I rejoined; "everything that skill and care can furnish you with here you shall have."

"Thank you, sir," he quietly replied, in no wise perturbed by my communication, which I now saw he was evidently fully expecting.

A pause of a moment or two followed, and then, turning the subject, I said, "Well, my dear fellow, now we have spoken about the poor, frail body, what about the soul? Are you saved, Alexander?"

"Oh! I could not say that, sir."

"But is it not time for you to be looking the things of eternity fully in the face? Why do you not come to Jesus, and then you would be saved?"

"I have thought of these things sometimes, sir, and I've read my Bible occasionally, and when I was well I went to church now and then. I know I'm not so good as I ought to be, but, I'm not so bad as a great many that I know of."

"All that may be quite true, Alexander, but it is beside the mark, and your not being so bad as some others will not help you before God, will it?"

"Oh, no, sir, that's quite true; but I have not lived a very bad life, and I hope to be saved."

"You need not 'hope to be saved,' you may know and have salvation where you lie this very night, if you will receive Christ; and perceiving that he was now somewhat interested I sat down on his bed and told him the gospel as simply and plainly as I could. He answered freely enough any question I put to him, and, as I pressed his own guilt upon his conscience, I saw he was convicted that he was a sinner, and, farther, a *lost* one, were he to die in his present state. Having unfolded the story of the cross, as God's only way of escape for a lost sinner, and assured him that God bade him do nothing but believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and rest simply on His finished work, I now pressed on him *immediate* acceptance of God's offered mercy and salvation. Quietly he listened to all till the clock struck eleven, when he said rather emphatically, "I'll think about it, sir."

"Stay," I argued; "why will you *think* about it, when God wants you to *take* Christ just where you lie, and be saved this night. The Philippian jailor heard of Jesus, believed on Him, and was saved immediately. Don't put off deciding, I beseech you."

"I promise you I'll think about it, sir. Good night."

Seeing he was determined only to "think about" and not to "receive" my message, I very reluctantly bade him "Good night."

His bed was quite at the bottom of the long ward and opposite its foot was a door. I crossed the ward, opened the door and was partly out in the passage, closing the door behind me, when, ere my hand released its grasp of the handle, a voice seemed to say, "Go back and speak to him once more." I hesitated. Was it fancy, or the Lord lingering in grace over one who was refusing His mercy? "Go back" again seemed to sound in my ears.

I returned to his bed, and, bending over him, said, "Alexander, I cannot leave you tonight with that terribly uncertain word, 'I'll think about it.' Oh, do decide for Christ. You may never have another opportunity of receiving or believing the gospel. God's word says 'Behold *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation.' I have come back just to beseech you not to 'think about' but to receive Christ."

A shade of displeasure, I grieve to say, rose upon his brow, and again repeating "I'll think about it, sir, a second time, he said "good night," and sorrowful at heart, I scarcely knew why, I now finally left him.

Chapter 2. — A MORNING OF DEATH.

The next morning, Lord's Day, at eight o'clock exactly, the nurse of the ward came hastily to my sitting-room, which was some distance off, begging that I would at once pay a visit to Alexander. Very speedily I was in the ward. A death-like stillness pervaded it. Several patients and the two nurses were round the bed I had sat on nine hours before, pressing Christ and salvation on the occupant thereof. As I drew near they scattered, giving me a view of Alexander's face. White as the sheet that came in contact with it, the truth was apparent, he was not faint, as some supposed, from loss of blood, but DEAD.

He had risen that morning as usual, was seated at the table eating his breakfast when, without the slightest warning, a torrent of blood flowed from his mouth (a large vessel in the lungs having given way, and, ere he could be placed in his bed, life ebbed away, and his pallid and lifeless corpse alone met my gaze, as, for the third time within nine hours, I stood by that bed at the foot of the ward.

That moment I shall never forget! Gone, and where? Into eternal night, I feared. To myself I said, "Ah! poor Alexander, you will have time enough now to 'think about it,' when, alas! it is too late to believe and receive it."

Oh, the horrors of a night without a morning! I fear, poor fellow, he entered it by the gaping doorway of procrastination.

Chapter 3. — "I'LL NOT SLEEP TILL IT'S SETTLED."

It was a cold, cheerless day in October, 1865, and "Auld Reekie," [Edinburgh] more than ordinarily enveloped, in mist for the time of the year, was sullenly submitting to be drenched with rain, and pierced by the cold east blasts that came fresh from the northern ocean. Without, all was wet, cold, and dirty; within, everything was as bright, tidy, and clean as the usual autumnal expenditure of soap, paint, and whitewash could render the ward, while a blazing fire at each end diffused a genial glow of warmth, all the more enjoyable from the contrast visible through the newly cleaned windows. A good many of the beds had each their occupant, but still there was room for more ere, the complement, of eighteen was attained.

The hour was drawing near for the arrival of the visiting physician when, two young men entered the ward, and the elder, addressing me, said, "Would you be kind enough to prescribe for my friend, sir, he has a bad cold and cough?" Turning to see his companion, I beheld a youth of seventeen, whose face made a lasting impression on me, from its rare expression and almost feminine beauty. Fair as a woman, with a soft speaking, grey eye, a finely chiselled Grecian nose, and every other exquisite proportion, he seemed not a subject for hospital treatment, had not a delicate tell-tale blush in the centre of each cheek given a clue to mischief needing prompt attention. After a question or two and a cursory examination, I determined to induce him to remain in the infirmary, and accordingly urged him to do so. He hesitated, saying he had come from London for a little change and holiday, and to be in ward would be no holiday, and he did not think he was ill enough to necessitate this. There was some truth in this, but I was so interested in him that I alluded to the inclement weather as making it imprudent for him to go much out with his then symptoms, etc., So, after a little pressure, in which his friend joined, he consented to come in the next day at noon.

On Saturday, Alexander U- entered the ward at the appointed hour, and at the usual evening visit, having seen my other patients, I proceeded to make a careful examination of his chest. The apex of each lung gave the faintest indication, of that dire disease which, I suspected from his cheek — consumption.

A question or two drew out the family history, His mother had died of consumption, and he had lost four brothers through the same fatal scourge, each of them having died, he said, within six weeks of taking ill, and then added, "I'm much afraid I'm going the same way, sir."

"Indeed, why should you think this?"

"Oh, they all began just like me, and somehow, I don't think I'll get better . . . Do you think so, Doctor?"

"Well, Alexander, your family history is certainly very bad, but, as your trouble has been detected thus early, I hope, with proper treatment, it may be arrested."

He looked incredulous but thankful, and, perceiving that he was beginning to have some confidence in me, I continued, "Supposing you don't get better, Alexander, what then? Are you ready to die?"

"Me ready? Oh, no, sir; I'm not ready. If I were to die just now, I know I should be lost for ever."

"Then you have thought about your soul sometimes, I should judge from what you say?"

"No, sir; I can't say I ever thought seriously, though I was well brought up. I had godly parents, and a praying mother, but she's dead long since and gone to heaven, I believe (and here the remembrance of a mother's faith and piety caused the tears to fill his eyes). I got good instruction when I was a boy, but I left my home some time since and went to London, where I have been a clerk."

"And what happened in London?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell the truth, I got amongst ungodly comrades, very soon I became dissipated and wild, and I believe it's my reckless life that has brought my illness on. It's all my own fault, I can blame no one but myself; I deserve punishment for my sins, and there's no chance for me to be saved, for I know I'm only a wicked sinner."

"But, would you not like to be saved?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; but there's no salvation for the like of me."

"There is where you are wrong. Did you never hear the word, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*?' You are the very one that Jesus wants and came for He is a Saviour, and you are a sinner. They are just suited to each other. The sinner needs a Saviour to save him, and the Saviour is on the look out for the sinner to save. More, He died for the sinner. The 8th verse of Romans 5 says, 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us.' Now, don't you believe that Jesus died for you?"

"I believe He died for you, sir, for you are a good man, but He could not have died for a wretch like me."

"Wrong again, Alexander. It was not for the good Jesus died, for 'none is good save One, that is God,' and 'there is none that *doeth* good, no, not one.' So you see I am not good, neither are you, and yet Jesus died for us. The reason why He died was that He loved us, as Paul said,

"Who loved me, and gave himself for me." Oh, think of His love, and trust Him. There is in Him, now a free, full salvation, if you will only receive Him. What say you, will you turn to Him now, and trust Him? He died for sinners, but, having completely finished the work of atonement, He rose the third day, in proof of the value of His work, and now, alive in glory, He is waiting to receive, bless, and save you, just as He saved the thief on the cross."

"Oh, Sir, it's all for the like of you, but not for me."

I shall never forget that night, nor Alexander's face, as I passed on to tell him more of the grace and love of Jesus. Lying flat on his back, with compressed lips, heaving nostril, and eyes bathed in tears fixed on me, he listened truly for life. Every word seemed to enter his soul, while the more he heard of the Lord's love, only, the more deep became the sense of his own guilt. I had no need to press decision on him, he was only too anxious to be decided. By this time it was getting late, and the lights in the ward had been lowered, so I was about to bid him good night and depart, when he said, "Please, sir, won't you pray with me, before you go?" I am so much obliged to you for speaking with me, but I'd so like if you would pray."

This I did, looking to the Lord that His blessing might fall that night on the awakened lad. Scarcely had I finished, ere he grasped my hand and exclaimed, "Thank you, sir. Good night. I'll not sleep till it's settled."

I bade him good night, and retired to my bed.

Chapter 4. — A MORNING OF LIFE.

On the Lord's Day I usually visited the patients pretty early. So shortly after 9 a.m. I was again in the ward where Alexander was.

I had barely entered it when a sound, but rarely heard under similar circumstances, fell on my ear in the shape of a cheery but courteous "Good morning, sir." Looking up, I beheld my young friend dressed, and standing at the foot of his bed, which was the nearest to the door.

"Good morning, Alexander."

"It's all right sir."

"'It's all right!' What do you mean?"

"Oh, what you were speaking of last night. I could not sleep after you left for thinking, of my sins, and what you told me about the Saviour, and His love in dying on the cross for sinners like me. I lay awake thinking till four o'clock, and then (pointing to a window across the ward, opposite his bed), I seemed to see the Saviour dying on the cross, extended there for me and bearing my sins, and I heard Him say. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' So I just came to Him, and I have rest now, sir. I have found Jesus, and I am so happy."

Had you seen his face at that moment, my reader, even you would not have doubted his statement. It was like the face of an angel, perfectly radiant with divine joy. There was no mistake about it. He had simply and unreservedly cast himself upon Christ (go thou, friend, and do likewise), and, as a consequence, was filled "with all joy and peace in believing." Alexander remained nearly a fortnight in the infirmary, during which time he gave every evidence of being a child of God, and grew rapidly in grace, while it was only too evident also that his bodily disease was taking the same rapid course as in his brothers. This being so, it was resolved to give

him the chance of life which a voyage to, and residence in Australia afforded. A rich relation kindly paid his passage, so in November he returned to London to await the sailing of a vessel. While there I received two letters from him. One contained this expression: "I am very happy as regards my soul's salvation. *I hope that you do always remember me at the throne of grace.*" The second, "I am thankful to be able to inform you that I am very much better indeed, and Dr. I- strongly recommends me to go to Australia at once. I am going, if spared, on the 30th of this month (December), in a ship called 'The London,' of London . . . I hope you do not *forget me* in your prayers."

Chapter 5. — GOING HOME IN A STORM.

January, 1866, will long be remembered. During the first week there called at Plymouth for passengers and letters a magnificent, full-rigged iron ship of 2,000 tons. Her captain was a man of skill and experience, the officers and crew being picked men. On the 6th, "The London" sailed for Melbourne, with a cargo valued at £120,000, and having also a freight of living souls, of untold value, to the number of 239, amongst them being my young friend Alexander. Scarcely was the gallant ship out of sight of land than she experienced a succession of gales, which culminated on the night of the 10th in a hurricane, which many will remember cast numerous vessels ashore in Torbay. Before the fury of this blast in the Bay of Biscay she succumbed. Tremendous seas at once stove in her stern ports, smashed her boats, carried away her engine-room hatches, extinguished the fires, and rapidly filled the hold with water. By vigorous pumping she was kept above water till daylight of the 11th. Then the brave captain called all into the saloon and plainly said there was no hope of escape. This intimation was quietly received, because expected.

In the saloon the Rev. Mr. Draper prayed aloud, and exhorted the unhappy creatures by whom he was surrounded. Dismay was present to many hearts, disorder to none. Mothers were seen weeping sadly over the little ones, about, with them, to be engulfed, and the children, ignorant of their coming death, were pitifully enquiring the cause of so much woe. Friends were taking leave of friends, as if preparing for a long journey. Others, crouched down with Bibles in their hands, were endeavouring to snatch consolation from passages long known, or long neglected. At 2 p.m. a pinnace was got out, into which 16 of the crew and 3 passengers stepped, and scarcely was the boat clear of "The London" than, stern foremost, she sank, carrying to a watery grave 220 precious souls, amongst them my beloved young friend and brother in the Lord, Alexander U-.

When this heart-rending tale reached me I was deeply grieved at having been the promoter of the Australian voyage, so, knowing his father and only sister were alive, I sat down and wrote to the old man a letter of comfort, telling of the Lord's grace to his son while in the infirmary, and the firm conviction I had that his son was now with the Lord. The first man from the place where he dwelt brought a beautiful letter in reply. It was full of sadness and resignation. I give the substance: "I have had six sons. Four died of consumption, the fifth I heard of six months ago as lying ill in a hospital in China, and I fear he is gone; and now Alexander, my youngest, is taken, but, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' I believe you have been the means of leading my boy to the Saviour. He wrote many times to his

only sister, beseeching her to give her heart to the Lord, and when his vessel touched at Plymouth he would be so happy to receive a letter which she wrote him, saying, she too had sought and found the Saviour. So I am comforted, though it is hard to bear."

The ways of God are wondrous, and in nothing more sweetly seen than in the channels of blessing He uses, and the way the, circle of blessing widens. The brother is converted in the infirmary, through his letters the sister is led to the Lord; he goes home to be with Christ in the way described (and what a blessing he may have been to many awakened souls on board that vessel God only knows, and, the day of the Lord alone will declare), while the sister holds on her way rejoicing for a brief year or two, and then joins her brother in the Lord's presence, as I have since learned from another source.

And now, dear reader, I must have just one word with you as to the state of your own soul. Whereabouts are you? Have you received Christ yet? If not, don't delay a single day. Let the history above recorded be both a warning and an example. Could there be a greater *similarity*, and yet a greater *contrast*? Both had the same name, lay in the same ward, were suffering from the same disease, were nearly the same age, heard the same glad tidings, and each on a Saturday night. One *delays*, and within nine hours is in eternity, I fear without Christ; the other *decides*, and in less than nine hours is in the full possession of joy and peace, through simple faith in Christ. True, he too now is in eternity, but I am persuaded it is "with Christ;" and often as I picture to myself the stricken vessel, and her fated freight, methinks, high above the roar of the wind, the lash of the waves, and the wail of sorrow, I hear, soft and sweet, the words of the young believer, "*I am very happy as regards my soul's salvation.*"

Could you, beloved reader, say the same were: you in similar circumstances? Now, do be persuaded. If you have halted till now, halt no longer. Begin this new year with Christ. Let those that have rolled by suffice for rejecting Him. *Receive* Him now, by faith in His name, and start "in Christ a new creature."

Let not Satan lure you into saying, "I'll think about it, lest you be like the first Alexander in his end; but, the rather, may your language truly be, "I'll not sleep till it's settled;" then, surely, whether living or dying, your testimony shall be as clear and distinct as that of the second, "It's all right," and "I am very happy as regards my soul's salvation."

W. T. P. W.

Edinburgh, Jan. 1, 1873.