

ILLUSTRATIONS OF BIBLE TRUTH

by

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CHAPTER TWO

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BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND

“If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

On one occasion Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, the agnostic lecturer of the last century, was announced to give an address on hell. He declared he would prove conclusively that hell was a wild dream of some scheming theologians who invented it to terrify credulous people. As he was launching into his subject, a half-drunken man arose in the audience and exclaimed, “Make it strong, Bob. There's a lot of us poor fellows depending on you. If you are wrong, we are all lost. So be sure you prove it clear and plain.”

No amount of reasoning can nullify God's sure Word. He has spoken as plainly of a hell for the finally impenitent as of a heaven those who are saved.

COBBLING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

“Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

When I was a boy, I felt it was both a duty and a privilege to help my widowed mother make ends meet by finding employment in vacation time, on Saturdays and other times when I did not have to be in school.

For quite a while I worked for a Scottish shoemaker, or “cobbler,” as he preferred to be called, an Orkney man, named Dan Mackay. He was a forthright Christian and his little shop was a real testimony for Christ in the neighborhood. The walls were literally covered with Bible texts and pictures, generally taken from old-fashioned Scripture Sheet Almanacs, so that look where one would, he found the Word of God staring him in the face. There was John 3:16 and John 5:24, Romans 10:9, and many more.

On the little counter in front of the bench on which the owner of the shop sat was a Bible, generally open, and a pile of gospel tracts. No package went out of that shop without a printed message wrapped inside. And whenever opportunity offered, the customers were spoken to kindly and tactfully about the importance of being born again and the blessedness of knowing that the soul is saved through faith in Christ.

Many came back to ask for more literature or to inquire more particularly as to how they might find peace with God, with the blessed results that men and women were saved, frequently right in the shoe-shop.

It was my chief responsibility to pound leather for shoe soles. A piece of cowhide would be cut to suit, then soaked in water. I had a flat piece of iron over my knees and, with a flat-headed hammer, I pounded these soles until they were hard and dry. It seemed an endless operation to me, and I wearied of it many times.

What made my task worse was the fact that, a block away, there was another shop that I passed going and coming to or from my home, and in it sat a jolly, godless cobbler who gathered the boys of the neighborhood about him and regaled them with lewd tales that made him dreaded by respectable parents as a menace to the community. Yet, somehow, he seemed to thrive and that perhaps to a greater extent than my employer, Mackay. As I looked in his window, I often noticed that he never pounded the soles at all, but took them from the water, nailed them on, damp as they were, and with the water splashing from them as he drove each nail in.

One day I ventured inside, something I had been warned never to do. Timidly, I said, "I notice you put the soles on while still wet. Are they just as good as if they were pounded?" He gave me a wicked leer as he answered, "They come back all the quicker this way, my boy!"

Feeling I had learned something, I related the instance to my boss and suggest that I was perhaps wasting time in drying out the leather so carefully. Mr. Mackay stopped his work and opened his Bible to the passage that reads, "**Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.**"

"Harry," he said, "I do not cobble shoes just for the four bits or six bits (50 cents or 75 cents) that I get from my customers. I am doing this for the glory of God. I expect to see every shoe I have ever repaired in a big pile at the judgment seat of Christ, and I do not want the Lord to say to me in that day, 'Dan, this was a poor job. You did not do your best here.' I want Him to be able to say, '**Well done, good and faithful servant.**'"

Then he went on to explain that just as some men are called to preach, so he was called to fix shoes, and that only as he did this well would his testimony count for God.

It was a lesson I have never been able to forget. Often when I have been tempted to carelessness, or to slipshod effort, I have thought of dear, devoted Dan Mackay, and it has stirred me up to seek to do all as for Him who died to redeem me.

COPPER NAILS

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long” (Psalm 32:3).

There is nothing that so takes the joy out of life like unconfessed sin on the conscience.

I once heard the late Dr. F. E. Marsh tell that on one occasion he was preaching on this question and urging upon his hearers the importance of confession of sin and wherever possible, of restitution for wrong done to others.

At the close a young man, a member of the church, came up to him with a troubled countenance. “Pastor,” he explained, “you have put me in a sad fix. I have wronged another and I am ashamed to confess it or to try to put it right. You see, I am a boat builder and the man I work for is an infidel. I have talked to him often about his need of Christ and have urged him to come and hear you preach, but he scoffs, and ridicules it all. Now, I have been guilty of something that, if I should acknowledge it to him, will ruin my testimony forever.”

He then went on to say that some time ago he started to build a boat for himself in his own yard. In this work copper nails are used because they do not rust in the water. These nails are quite expensive and the young man had been carrying home quantities of them to use on the job. He knew it was stealing, but he tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that the master had so many he would never miss them and besides he was not being paid all that he thought he deserved. But this sermon had brought him to face the fact that he was just a common thief, for whose dishonest actions there was no excuse.

“But,” said he, “I cannot go to my boss and tell what I have done or offer to pay for those I have used and return the rest. If I do he will think I am just a hypocrite. And yet those copper nails are digging into my conscience and I know I shall never have peace until I put this matter right.”

For weeks the struggle went on. Then one night he came to Dr. Marsh and exclaimed, “Pastor, I’ve settled for the copper nails and my conscience is relieved at last.”

“What happened when you confessed to your employer what you had done?” asked the pastor.

“Oh,” he answered, “he looked queerly at me, then exclaimed, ‘George, I always did think you were just a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there’s something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them, must be worth having.’”

Dr. Marsh asked if he might use the story, and was granted permission.

Sometimes afterwards, he told it in another city. The next day a lady came up and said, “Doctor, I have had ‘copper nails’ on my conscience too.”

“Why, surely, you are not a boat builder!”

“No, but I am a book-lover and I have stolen a number of books from a friend of mine who gets far more than I could ever afford. I decided last night I must get rid of the 'copper nails,' so I took them all back to her today and confessed my sin. I can't tell you how relieved I am. She forgave me, and God has forgiven me. I am so thankful the 'copper nails' are not digging into my conscience any more.”

I have told this story many times and almost invariably people have come to me afterwards telling of “copper nails” in one form or another that they had to get rid of. On one occasion, I told it at a High School chapel service. The next day the principal saw me and said, “As a result of that 'copper nails' story, ever so many stolen fountain pens and other things have been returned to their rightful owners.”

Reformation and restitution do not save. But where one is truly repentant and has come to God in sincere confession, he will want to the best of his ability to put things right with others.

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