

WILLIAM TATTON.



IS Religion intended by God to be something which uproots and re-creates a man's character, transforming the human self until an angelic self is substituted? This is hardly so. Our experience of life teaches otherwise. Rather is Religion a guiding and leading principle which converts the erring impulse, stimulating and sanctifying the better and higher instincts of a man. This is why we occasionally find men of strong natural powers, gifted with specially marked character and personality, whose lives, though influenced by a deep religious conviction, yet appear to be outwardly but little influenced by religion. Others, whose natures are more easily affected by spiritual influences, exhibit the religious spirit spontaneously and are, as it were, naturally devout.

Of the first class was Mr. William Tatton, a brief sketch of whose life we are asked to write. He was before all things manly. His was a strong character. He enjoyed the world, taking a lively interest in his surroundings, his friends, his bodily and daily life. He was never outwardly or ostentatiously religious. Yet it is true to say that the under-current of his life was a deep sense of God's love and mercy. The religious spirit in him was at the root of his life rather than its efflorescence.

He was born at Leek 3rd November, 1837. His father was a silk dyer, and carried on business at the Churnet Dye-Works, Leek. For very many years his father had been connected with the West Street Sunday School and was a Trustee of that institution. William Tatton was educated at the Leek Grammar School. His career as a school-boy was rather remarkable. He withstood the headmaster, and tradition states that master and pupil came to blows. Later the headmaster had to resign his mastership in circumstances that did not lend lustre to his name. This fact is mentioned here because it brings out William Tatton's strong determination to resist anything like injustice or unfairness. The tradition of the conflict with the pedagogue of the Leek Grammar School lingered for many

years among Leek school-boys ; and as a youth and young man William Tatton was regarded as a hero, the champion of right against tyranny. This made his position somewhat conspicuous, and gave him a good deal of popularity with boys and young men which helped him in later years when he became the acting superintendent at West Street in the junior school. After his school days were over he entered the dyeing business of his father, becoming an expert in that branch of industry. Leaving the paternal business he set up on his own account at Upper-hulme. There was an old mill there which had been used for the manufacture of cotton. It owed its position to the stream of water which hurries past it. In that stream William Tatton's quick eye saw the means of establishing a dyeing business. The Churnet water at Leek was supposed to be essential to the art of dyeing raven sewing silk. Here was the Churnet itself, fresh and unpolluted, rushing and dashing away from its springs behind the Roaches ! He seized on this as an ideal spot for dyeing silk and succeeded in establishing a sound good business there. This was in 1869. A few years later the mill was damaged—and all but destroyed—by fire. It was then rebuilt and considerably enlarged. William Tatton was a liberal master and thoroughly deserved the affection with which he was regarded by his workpeople. His relations with his employees were of the most gratifying kind. He was at home with them, knew them all quite well, and talked to them on equal terms. While he rightly controlled his business there was no pride or pretended dignity to raise a barrier between him and his workpeople. Nothing interfered with the freest intercourse between him and them. "For all practical purposes our hands are mere machines" was said once by a Leek manufacturer many years ago, but this harsh and unchristian sentiment found no echo in such a heart as William Tatton's. Labour there must be : capital there must be ; and so the capitalist and the labourer are both necessities in a society constituted on its present basis. But it is not necessary even in our present artificially constituted society to exclude the Christian principles of brotherhood and love. The attempt of some manufacturers to treat Labour as a thing to be exploited merely in their own interest finds no commendation from the Lord and Saviour of us all. The supposition that the world is governed solely by economic laws of supply and demand, that self-interest is the sole nexus between man and man is utterly opposed to our

Lord's teaching, whose answer to the legal question, "Who is my neighbour?" is a perpetual denial of the axioms of the dismal science of modern political economy. William Tatton treated his workpeople as men and women with bodies to be fed, clothed, and cared for, and with souls to be saved. His conduct in this respect afforded an example and a rebuke to many so-called Christian employers.

The remaining incidents of his life are soon told. In 1873 he married Miss Hall, sister of Mr. John Hall, J.P. He filled many offices in the Wesleyan Church and was a liberal supporter of its many activities. For many years he was School Visitor and practically the Acting Superintendent of the Junior School at West Street and from 1881 to his death was the Treasurer of that institution. In all his affairs he was punctual and regular in his attendance. He faithfully discharged every duty which he undertook.

No account of him would be complete which did not mention his attachment to the cause of Temperance. He was not only a life-long abstainer, but was an active and energetic member of the Leek Temperance Society and a pillar of the cause of Total Abstinence in Leek.

In 1901 he had a paralytic attack which prostrated him so that he was never able again to attend to his business. His sufferings were often severe and they were protracted; but they were borne with fortitude and resignation. He died 2nd June, 1904. He left a widow, two daughters and one son. The last-named carries on the business founded by his father.

Mr. Tatton's name will always be associated with West Street School where his genial smile, his kindly welcome and hearty hand-shake are things that cannot be forgotten. He was an unpretentious man, not given to assert himself, but withal quite ready to do so if he considered it necessary or proper. He made no parade of enthusiasm in religion or in anything else, but he was one of those stalwart strong souls on whom absolute reliance might be placed. His word was his bond. He was nothing if he was not straight-forward, honest, and sincere.

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