

WILLIAM DENTON

From a sketch by D. M. Bennett, in his work 'The World's Sages, Thinkers and Reformers,' we gather the following particulars concerning Professor Denton, who died of fever in New Guinea:—

"This courageous geologist and Radical," says his biographer, "was born at Darlington, Durham county, England, on the 8th January, 1823. William's father was quite poor, and ignorant of all scholarship, but a true, sturdy, industrious woolcomber, and had to support a family of four children on 10s a week. At the age of eight William Denton was placed at a day school, in which the tutor gave experiments with a galvanic battery, besides giving "practical lessons in phrenology and electricity." At this stage of his career William commenced his studies in geology, reading closely on the subject, and preparing, hammer in hand, for future researches. "When eleven years old he was hired by a currier of Darlington for a year at half crown a week. After serving his time in the currier's shop, he was employed 3 months by a Methodist minister in a grocery store. This situation was highly satisfactory to his father, who was a firm Methodist. William, one day, however, detected his master giving false weight, by placing a piece of lead on the scale. He told his father, who went to "the Methodist minister grocer," and after denouncing his dishonesty, took the boy away from his service. After leaving the grocery business, William was sent to the Darlington Grammar School, where he acquired the rudiments of Greek and Latin. At the age of 14 he was apprenticed to Timothy Hackworth, at Shildon, to learn the trade of machinist. Working during the day he did not waste his leisure hours at night, and read the works of Lyell, attended scientific lectures, and became a member of the Mechanics' Institute. He also pursued his geological studies in a railway tunnel near Shildon. At 16 he joined the Methodist Association Church, and within a year after commenced lecturing on Temperance and giving addresses on religion in Sunday School. He soon became an adept at speaking, taking part in theological debates and addressing meetings in farm kitchens or on the open green. At length he got hold of Combe's "Constitution of Man." The minister said to him, "William, that is a very dangerous book," and proceeded to prove the statement by citing Combe's illustration of the two boats. Denton, however, continued studying Combe, and found the illustration of the boats true, and straightway began to manifest heresy in his speeches. He was now 19, and still with Timothy Hackworth. One day his master told him to go to a brewery to repair some machinery. This would conflict with his radical temperance principles, and he spoke to Hackworth about having conscientious scruples. Hackworth sneered at "conscience," and sent Denton away. He next tried teaching in a school at Newport. He also lectured on Temperance, and preached frequently in London. He often used to walk 12 miles to Cardiff on Saturday, preach three times on Sunday and walk back on Monday morning in time for school. At this time he was one of the most active fighters for Temperance in England. He continued lecturing on Temperance, Mesmerism, and Radicalism, until he made many enemies, and was dismissed from the school. He had to sell his books to prevent starvation, and emigrated to America. He landed in Philadelphia in 1848. His life in the United States continued to be a series of struggles. During the latter years of his life he continued to lecture and write principally in New England. A series of his discourses are published. He has established a reputation as a geologist, and was reckoned amongst the ablest advocates of Spiritualism.

THE MORNING STAR.

We have the morning star,
O foolish people, O kings!
With us the daysprings are,
Even all the fresh daysprings;
For us, and with us, all the multitudes of things.

O sorrowing hearts of slaves,
We heard you beat from far!
We bring the light that saves,
We bring the morning star;
Freedom's good things we bring you, whence all good things are.

The strife of things and beauty,
The fire and light adored,
Truth and life-lightening duty,
Love without crown or sword,
That by his might and godhead makes man god and lord.

These have we, these are ours,
That no priests give, nor kings;
The honey of all these flowers,
The heart of all these springs;
Ours, for where freedom lives not, there live no good things.

Rise, ere the dawn be risen;
Come, and be all souls fed;
From field, and street, and prison,
Come for the feast is spread;
Live, for the truth is living; wake, for the night is dead.

A. C. Swinburne.

Some person with a turn for dismal statistics has computed that the chances of being murdered in Rome and England are as 237 to 1.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S THEOLOGY.

The following passages are from an article by Florence Nightingale in Fraser's Magazine in 1873. The article is headed "A 'Note' of Interrogation," and its aim is to interrogate whether the greater portion of the religious teaching of the present day is not misdirected, on the ground that it fails to inform men what is the true character of God:—

Is it not a simple impertinence for preachers and schoolmasters, literally *ex cathedra*, to be always inculcating and laying down what they call the commands of God, and never telling us what the God is who commands, often indeed representing Him as worse than a devil? "Because I am God and not man." But you represent Him as something far below man, worse than the worst man, the worst Eastern tyrant that was ever heard of.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Ah, from the mouth of him who said these words, they are indeed the "first and greatest commandment." He who went about doing good, who called all of us who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him—who towards His cruel torturers and murderers felt nothing but "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"—He might well say, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," for he needed not to explain to us His character.

But—and what a descent is here!—for us to lay it down as a *command* to love the Lord God! Alas! poor mankind might easily answer:—"I can't love because I am ordered—least of all can I love One who seems to make me miserable here to torture me hereafter. Show me that He is good, that He is lovable, and I shall love him without being told."

But does any preacher show us this? He may say that God is good, but he shows him to be very bad. He may say that God is "Love," but he shows him to be *hate*, worse than any hate of man. As the Persian poet says—"If God punishes me for doing evil by doing me evil, how is he better than I?" And it is hard to answer. For certainly the worst man would hardly torture his enemy, if he could, for ever. And unless God has a scheme that every man is to be saved for ever, it is hard to say in what He is not worse than man. For all good men would save others if they could.

A poor man, dying in a workhouse, said to his nurse after having seen his clergyman—"It does seem hard to have suffered so much here, only to go to everlasting torments hereafter." Schopenhauer has the feeling, which must be that of half the world, been so simply expressed.

How then is it possible to teach either that God is "Love" or that God commands any duty: unless God has a plan for bringing each and all of us to perfection? How can we work at all if there be no such a plan? It is not enough that God should not be willing to punish everlastingly—to show that He is good. He must be accomplishing a *design*, "invariable and without a shadow of turning," the desire to save every one of us everlastingly. There must be no giving the go by to searching out, as the very first condition of religion, whether there be such a plan.

Take e.g., some of the most familiar instances of mistakes, arising from not understanding the character of God.

That God regards suffering as good in itself, that He pays well those who inflict it on themselves, is the basis on which was founded a very large polity in the Roman Catholic Church.

That God has so let go man as to become essentially wicked, for which he has instituted no other system of help except letting Another pay the penalty for man, was the foundation of another theory of religion sometimes called "Evangelical."

That this barbarising doctrine does not make man barbarous, at least not very, can only be because men are so much better than their God.

It is of no use saying that God is just, unless we define what justice is. In all Christian times people have said that "God is just," and have credited Him with an injustice such as transcends all human injustice that it is possible to conceive, e.g., that He condemns to "everlasting fire," for not being baptised, little babies who certainly could not get themselves baptised. What is the most horrible and wholesale infanticide compared with this? Not even that of the Frenchwoman farmer of babies who poured vitriol instead of milk down the babies' throats, and dipped their heads in boiling water. For she certainly did not mean to do this for eternity.

But would God be the more just, even though He does not damn the little babies, if He does not *save* them—if He has no scheme by which the little babies, who were never asked whether they would come into this world or not, are to be brought to perfect happiness?

Also, there is extraordinary confusion about what happiness is. Whole books have been written to prove that there is a very equal distribution of happiness all over the world in all classes and conditions of men. "Paupers are accustomed to pauperism, rich people are accustomed to enmity, savages to savagedom. All these have their pleasures." This is the argument. Do people who argue thus ever ask themselves for one moment what happiness is? Or do they really call the excitement of gin, the beastly momentary pleasure of sensuality, which alone diversify the miserable lives of hundreds of thousands of London poor, happiness? Or do they call the dead lock of carriages in Hyde Park, which minister to the enmity of the rich, happiness?

And well may they write to prove that every man in London, taking the average, has £10,000 a year, as that every man, taking the average, has happiness.

What a poor idea of happiness this is!

Is not the happiness of God, so far as we can conceive it, the only type of what happiness is? And why has God happiness? Not because He can do what He likes; but because what He likes is good.