

DON'T PUT OFF.



“**W**ELL indeed, I don't know why you are always putting it to me to be religious. I'm not worse than other people, and I'm young and strong. Sure there's time enough: if I was old and sickly, like you, 'twould be another thing. It worries me to have you going on like that; though I oughtn't to say it, for I know you do it for my good.”

So spoke Mary Shea to her suffering and aged friend, who loved her too well to let her alone, as Mary had often begged her to do. But Kate O'Neal had found the Saviour so very precious, that she could not rest till she had brought to him the kind young girl who so often cheered her lonely hours and per-

formed so many little offices of kindness for her, and whom the childless widow loved with almost a mother's love.

"Mary dear," she answered, "there is *not* time enough. If you are not in a hurry now sit down, while I tell you my own story, and how those very words, 'There is time enough,' have left me here helpless and suffering, with nothing else to look for on this side the grave; but, thanks be to God, with so bright and sure a prospect beyond, that I can wait patiently and thankfully till his time comes when he will call me to be with him and be like him for ever. But get your knitting and sit down, dear, for I have a rather long story to tell you."

Mary did so, and the widow went on.

"It is now twenty long years since I began to feel the pain that has crippled me. At first it came and went; sometimes I was quite free from it, and then again I could not sleep for nights, it was so sharp.

" 'You should go at once to the doctor, before it gets worse,' said my kind friend, the lady who visited the district where I lived; and she gave me a note to her own physician, the best and kindest in the city. I thanked her, and when I had a bad night, I determined to go the next morning; but when the morning came, and I felt better, I put it off. Sure there's time enough, I said—may be it will go as it came; at all events I'll wait a bit. And so I went on for weeks and months, growing worse, but so gradually that I scarcely observed it. But to the doctor I did not go.

Yet, though I could have had the best advice, and medicine too, just for the going for it, I was all this time trying everything that any neighbour recom-

mended. I took pills that almost poisoned me, and draughts, no matter how disagreeable they were, nor how much they cost. In vain the lady tried to open my eyes to see the folly of trying everything and any one but the doctor. 'Oh, Mrs. O'Neal,' she said, and the tears were standing in her eyes, 'you are ruining yourself; it may soon be too late; now promise you will go to-morrow. I shall not see you again for some weeks, as I intend going to-morrow into the country, and I should go so much happier if I thought you were under the doctor's care.'

"Well, I promised, and fully intended, to go; but the next morning was wet, and I waited till the next. Meanwhile an old neighbour came in, and said she would set me all right in a fortnight if I would try her cure.

"I said, 'I have promised to go next day to the doctor.' 'Oh,' she said, 'sure there's time enough; try me for a wee bit, and go to the doctor if I fail.'

"And I did try her. I took her drops and wore her plaisters; but the pain grew worse. She said that was a sign her treatment was doing me good; for her part, she 'didn't think anything that was quiet and easy ever did good, to either soul or body; medicine that gave no pain and cost nothing was,' she thought, 'just like the religion of some people, who said we could be saved, and go to heaven, just by believing: as if that could save any one! She had lived a long life, and she never knew anything worth having that was to be got for nothing.'

"As she spoke, two little texts I had often heard from my lady flashed into my mind: 'The gift of God is eternal life;' and, 'Come, buy without money and without price;' but I didn't say this to

her. After a little while she went away, leaving me worse than she found me ; and I saw no more of her.

“ At the end of two months the lady who first spoke to me came again, and found me in such terrible pain, that she said she would not let me wait another hour. She herself went for a cab, and then, having wrapped a shawl around me, she made the driver lift me in, and told him to drive to the A—Hospital. Reaching it, more dead than alive, I was carried upstairs, gently undressed and laid in bed, and the doctor came and examined me.

“ His first words were : ‘ It is too late—I can do nothing for her ; why did she not come before ? The disease might easily have been checked in the beginning ; but it has now made such way, that there is no overcoming it : it is too late. I suspect,’ he went on to say, ‘ that she is another of the many victims to the saying, There is time enough. Besides, she has been dreadfully injured by some poisonous stuff she has been taking. I hope I may in some degree relieve the pain ; I shall keep her here for a time, and we will do our best. If she had only come in time ! But now, a cure is out of the question.’ And, as you see, Mary, his words were true words.

“ The lady sat beside me for some time after the doctor left, speaking little, for she saw I could not bear it. But she just whispered, ‘ Too late for the poor suffering body, Kate ; but not too late for the soul that will never die. Jesus is “ able to save to the uttermost.” “ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” To save *you*, Kate.’

“ All night I lay awake, too suffering, too weary, too troubled for sleep ; and all night long the words

rang in my ears, 'Too late! too late!' I was to be a helpless burden all my life, no good to any body, but a great trouble: pain and weakness would be my portion while I lived, and then—: I turned away from that thought, I dared not look beyond the grave. The bitterest drop in the bitter cup was, it's all my own fault; I might have had health and ease, and I would not. I was amazed at my folly; surely I had been mad!

"The long sleepless hours seemed as if they would never end; and, do what I would, I could not shut out the thoughts of what would be after death. Was it too late, even now, to go to Him of whom the lady spoke, of whom she had so often told me, when I would not hear? I almost feared so. Yet her last words were, 'Not too late for your soul. Jesus is "able to save to the uttermost."' "

"'Uttermost,'—I repeated that word over and over—'uttermost;' then he is able to save me, and it is *not* too late; and even I may be saved. A hope, so faint it could scarcely be called a hope, arose in my breast, and it seemed that, bad as the pain was, I could bear that, and worse, if, after this life, I might have a home in heaven. But no, it was too good to be true; it could not be for such as me.

"Then that other verse came to my mind, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,'—I am a sinner—surely I am a sinner, so he must have come to save me! I thought. My heart clung to the words, they filled it so full that there was no room for those other dreadful words, 'Too late!' They calmed me, so that towards morning I fell asleep, and when I woke the hope they had put in me was still there.

"I sadly wanted some one to speak to, some one

who could tell me if it was so, and that I might be saved? I asked the nurse, but she was one who knew nothing of Jesus herself. 'I think,' she said, 'if we do our duty, it will be all right. God is merciful.'

"Little as I knew, this could not satisfy me. 'I wish I knew more,' I said to her; 'but I know this, that if I am saved at all, it must be by Christ. He is the only Saviour. Sure if we could have saved ourselves, there would have been no need for the Son of God to come and suffer and die for us.'

"Well,' said the nurse, 'at all events, there's time enough to think of these things; I'm too busy now; I hope I shall have a quiet time some day to see after my soul.'

"That's what has ruined me,' I said; 'putting off till it's too late. Oh be warned by my mistake, and think now, even now, of your soul!'

"During the morning, the doctors came, and it was still the same sad word, 'Too late; we can do but little now;' and they left me.

"I was lonely and sad; the dark cloud came back darker than ever. I felt as if there was no hope for soul or body. I would not go to Christ when I was young and strong; how could I expect him to receive me now? At least I would try and make myself a little better, and then, perhaps—oh it was but a miserable hope. No wonder it gave me no comfort. Besides, as I tried to make myself better, I only found out how utterly bad I was. How often I said to myself, 'It is no good, it is too late! I may as well give it up.' Yet, even in that darkest hour of my life, I heard, as it were, a sweet, gentle voice whisper, 'To the uttermost.' 'Yes,' I said, 'but not me, not me!'

“So passed that day, and the next, and the next. I longed to see Miss S——, but illness kept her away, and it was not till the fourth day after that I saw her. Then I told her all my difficulties and my misery. She listened, and when I had done speaking, she knelt beside my bed, and, just as if the Lord himself was close by (as he surely was) she told it all to him, and asked him to open my eyes to see him as he is, the Saviour, the friend of sinners. And even as she spoke I seemed to catch a glimpse of him in his love and goodness.

“Then she took my difficulties, one by one, and answered them all, or rather seemed to make me answer them myself. She asked me if it was the power of the Lord Jesus, or his love, that I doubted, when I thought it was too late to come to him? I was silent for a while, and while she waited for an answer, I thought, and then said, ‘Surely he must be able to save me, for he is God.’

“‘And surely he is willing,’ she added; ‘for that was what brought him from heaven to earth, to live and die and rise again; it was the joy set before him for which he endured the cross. When on earth, he never sent any one away who came to him. He healed them all. He is the same now—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. As tender, as loving, as mighty as then; and he promises the help of his Holy Spirit to all who ask for that most precious gift. Will you doubt him still?’ With these, and many such words, she told me of him; and at last the doubt rolled away, and I saw him as my own Saviour.

“‘Do you still think you must wait to make yourself even a little better?’ she smilingly asked.

“ ‘Oh no,’ I said, ‘I dare not, I could not wait. Just as I am I come, I come!’

“ ‘But what of all the sins that made you afraid to come?’

“ ‘He bore them all himself, so they cannot be there against me,’ I said. ‘He just meant me and the like of me, when he wrote that verse you repeated just now: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” True, mine have been as crimson and as scarlet, but his blood has washed them all away. Yes, I am saved—saved now and saved for ever.’

“ Eighteen long years have passed since then and there I found my Saviour, or rather since he found me; years of pain and poverty, yet years of peace and blessing; for in them I have learned, more and more, how much I need, and how much Jesus has to give, and how much, by his Spirit, he is as a Friend, a Guide, and Helper even to me his weakest servant. He has kept his word and never left nor forsaken, me; and when the pain and weariness are very hard to bear, I just think how one hour in his presence will make up for it all.

“ Can you wonder, Mary darling, that I want you to come to him, too; and to come now; and thus not only be safe, but have the blessedness that I have missed, of loving and serving my Saviour when I had youth, and health, and strength? Mary, dear child, do not say—There’s time enough; I tremble to hear it, for I know how soon it may change into ‘Too late! too late!’ ”