

Number 1 in the series

A Great Legacy

*the influence of the Scriptures on a young
Irish girl and her family*

by Rev. R. J. Coates, MA

Number 3 in the series

A Winner of Souls

*the Witness of Walter Byrne
Counsellor for God in Dublin*

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IRISH CHURCH MISSIONS

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An old Dublin lady
recalls the
Hundred Texts

by Rev. R. J. Coates, MA
an Irish Church
Missions Publication
Number 2

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BLIND BUT SEEING

THE FOLLOWING STORY about the remarkable memory of an old lady who, now in her eighties, can yet recall many of the *Hundred Texts* of Scripture learnt in her childhood in an Irish Church Mission School, may need for some this introductory explanation about the *Texts*. No one can say who originally chose the *Hundred Texts*; some are a verse in length, and others several verses long. They have been used for well over a century in our Mission work. The first Commentary on the *Texts* was produced by Bishop Cheetham of Sierra Leone in 1881. He had used them in parochial work in England, and adopted the same method in his missionary work in Africa. There is evidence that they were quite widely used then on the Mission Field, and we believe there are still some areas where they are found to be very effective.

A fuller Commentary, setting out the methods and explanations of the *Texts* by means of question and answer was edited by the Reverend Henry Fish, the Dublin Superintendent of the Society. We still use the last very full Commentary, incorporating earlier material, compiled by the Reverend T. C. Hammond. With its many excellent notes and references, it has been well called a Manual of Theology. Basically, however, the *Texts*, though teaching the most profound truths, have been used mostly in teaching children. Some who may have read the booklet *A Great Legacy* may have doubted the ability of a young child of nine, such as Louisa O'Connor was when she had her dialogue with the priest in the Confessional, to give such answers. This present booklet may show, from an account of an old lady still alive, that such ability is not beyond the reach of the humblest.

'I could quote you the Bible from Genesis to Revelation', said a blind woman to one of our workers at the door of her Corporation flat. She followed this by quoting fully 1 John 1: 8, 9 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is

not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' and then Matthew 11: 28, 29, 30. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'. What was this dear old blind woman doing but quoting the *Hundred Texts*, word perfect. HOW COULD THIS BE? She had always been a Roman Catholic and was now eighty-four years old.

As a child she had attended ICM Lurgan Street School, where she was taught the *Texts*. She was then already losing her sight, and was blind at fourteen years. It was appreciated that she would have difficulty in earning her living, so she was given a little job teaching the *Hundred Texts* and simple spellings. For this she was paid a small weekly wage by private arrangement between the teachers. In teaching the *Texts* she had learnt them well enough to quote them accurately seventy years afterwards, and with her Roman Catholic neighbour listening too.

While learning the *Texts* she had also learnt their application. In a Legion of Mary Patrician Meeting she had quoted 1 John 1: 7 'But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin'. 'If all sin is cleansed away then there is no need of purgatory', she explained to the meeting when comment was invited. On another occasion, in the same meeting, she had explained that we ought to worship God only, quoting the reference and all the words of Revelation 22: 8,9 'And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prop-

hets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God'.

Would you believe it?—a little Roman Catholic girl teaching the *Hundred Texts* in an ICM School, and sixty or so years later teaching and applying them in a Legion of Mary Meeting!

But you may wonder why she is still a Roman Catholic, and whether she has positive faith. When spoken to of applying the Word of God to our own hearts, and the necessity of trusting the Saviour for the pardon of our sins, her answers gave hope that she was a true Christian.

The report above was received some time ago from one of our workers. You can imagine our surprise at a recent *Text Class*, held on Wednesday evenings, when an old lady with the white guide stick of the blind in her hand, and a little boy of eleven years holding her other arm, came into the room. She was soon introduced to us as the blind woman who had learned the *Texts* as a child. She told us that her only schooling had been at the Lurgan Street School, and that her mother (who would now be 115 if alive) had likewise received all her education in the Mission Schools. It was fascinating to hear stories of those far-off days, and of the teachers, many of them but names to us, whom she remembered so well.

We had begun our class, dealing with the text 1 John 2: 1, 2. 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world'. When she was informed that that was our text, she repeated it without difficulty. As is the manner of teaching, we explained the meaning of the important words in the text—'We have an advocate'. 'Advocate' means 'One who pleads for another on the grounds

of justice (called to the side of the offender) in a criminal suit. We compared Christ as our Advocate with Christ as our Mediator. The old lady at once gave us 1 Timothy 2: 5, 6. 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time'. Then we thought of Christ not only as our Advocate and Mediator, but as our Intercessor. Again, without difficulty, when given the reference (Hebrews 7: 25), she repeated the text word perfect. 'Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them'.

The class turned into a dialogue between myself as leader, and the old lady who could not see any of us, and yet who obviously felt at home as she recalled from the distant past texts very familiar to us all. How interesting it was to hear her say on 1 John 2: 2, 'Now what is the meaning of propitiation? I can't remember that'. Again I recalled the definition from the textbook - 'That which enables God to deal favourably with the sinner ("It means sacrificial pacification of an offended power" - Moule)'.

In speaking of how we come to God through the only Advocate, the one Mediator, (and there is no need of another) we emphasized that this was because Christ was both God and man. Here reference was made to John 14: 6. 'Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'. There is no other way. The second great reason why he is the only mediator, and only advocate, is that he alone is the one who is the propitiation for our sins, and who gave himself a ransom for all. So no saint or angel can share in this unique place which Christ has, because Christ alone is both God and man, and Christ alone made the atonement for sin.

In speaking of forgiveness when we had fallen into sin, that it

is received through Christ our Advocate through whom we approach God, we talked about how foolish it would be, if one was going to an earthly court, to put one's cause into the hands of an advocate or counsel whose ability was doubtful, if we could have the best and most perfect and successful in the world to plead for us. How foolish then to commit our souls to any, or seek God's pardon through any but Christ. With great ease the old lady quoted the texts from 1 John 1: 7. 'But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,' and then 1 John 1: 8, 9. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'.

You can imagine what a fascinating time it was to hear this old lady speak in this wonderful manner. The *Texts* were obviously the basis of her whole Christian outlook. She had not only learned them, but she *knew* them, and was still pondering over their meaning. She said that John 15: 4, 5 was a text that was often in her mind. 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing'.

Her little grandson had been sitting listening to her while she quoted and commented, and she occasionally referred to him, or some other member of the family. Billy was a great support to her, and she had taught him some of the texts, and the Gospel hymns she had learned as a child. She said to us, 'He has a sweet little voice. I'll get him to sing for you'. 'Go on, Billy,' she said, 'You start'. 'How can I,' he said, 'you have to sing the first part'. So she started, in her quavering voice, and the little boy respon-

ded. They sang a little Gospel dialogue, very Victorian in its form, but full of the wonderful simplicity of the Gospel of Christ, easy for a little child to grasp. One could not help feeling, if Billy lives to 100, he will never forget his grandmother, and the things she taught him.

Who can measure the influence that this old lady with the texts of Scripture in her mind, and in her heart, has had upon many people during her long life. It was interesting to hear of two other old women living near her, to whom she had taught the texts when they were children together in the Lurgan Street Schools. Alas, one of them, she said, often wondered, and was afraid that God might not forgive her for going to such a place, and learning a whole lot out of the Bible. In her old age she was frightened that God might think the same on the Judgement Day of her knowledge of the Scriptures as something unlawful, as her Church had made her believe in her childhood. We can say thank God we live in better days, when Roman Catholic people all have access to the Scriptures. May God grant that many of them may treasure God's word in their hearts, as does the blind old lady from the flats.

Here are the words of the Gospel hymn which Granny and Billy sang together

Who came from heaven to ransom us?
Jesus, who died upon the Cross.

Why did He come from heaven above?
He came because His name is Love.

And did He die, the Son of God?
Yes, on the Cross He shed His blood.

Why did my Lord and Saviour bleed?
That we from evil might be freed.

And when He died, what happened then?
On the third day He rose again.

Where is He now, is He still there?
Yes, and He pleads with God in prayer.

What does He plead, and for whom?
He pleads that we to Him should come.

Should we not come, should we not come?
Yes, Jesus bids the sinners come.

Christ is the weary sinners' home,
Oh, let us come; oh, let us come.

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