

## A BOYHOOD IN HELL

The Revd. H. d'Arcy Champney M. A. of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, had come out of sect. He had voted at the Parliamentary elections by crossing out the names of the candidates and writing: "I vote for King Jesus."

He had started a school for the Sons of Brethren at 51, Bateman Street, Cambridge. May God bite into the bones of men the pain of that hell on earth (I have prayed often) that by them it may be sowed with salt, accursed for ever! May the maiden that passes it be barren, and the pregnant woman that beholdeth it abort! May the birds of the air refuse to fly over it! May it stand as a curse, as a fear, as an hate, among men! May the wicked dwell therein! May the light of the Sun be withheld therefrom, and the light of the Moon not lighten it! May it become the home of the shells of the dead, and may the demons of the pit inhabit it! May it be accursed, accursed, accursed—accursed for ever and ever!

And still, standing as I stand in the prime of early manhood, free from all the fetters of the body and the mind, do I curse the memory thereof unto the ages.

It was a good enough school from the point of examiners, I dare say. Morally and physically it was an engine of destruction and corruption. I am just going to put down a few facts haphazard as they come to my memory; you may form your own judgment.

1. We were allowed to play Cricket, but not to score runs, lest it should excite the vice of "emulation."

2. Champney told me, a child of not yet twelve years old, that he had never consummated his marriage, (Only the very acute verbal memory which I possess enabled me years after to recall and interpret his meaning. He used a coarser phrase).

3. We were told that "the Lord had a special care of the school, and brought to light that which was done in darkness", etc., etc., "ad nauseam." "The instrument was on this occasion so-and-so, who had nobly come forward, etc., etc." In other words, hypocrisy and sneaking were the only virtues.

Naturally, one of several boys who might be involved in the same offence would take fright and save his skin by sneaking. The informer was always believed implicitly, as against probability, or even possibility, with complete disregard of the testimony of other and independent witnesses.

For instance, a boy named Glascott, with insane taint, told Mr. Champney that he had visited me (12 years old) at my mother's house during the holidays—true so far, he had—and found me "lying drunk at the bottom of the stairs." My mother was never asked about this; nor was I told of it. I was put into "Coventry" i.e. nor master nor boy might speak to me, or I to them. I was fed on bread and water; during playhours I worked in the schoolroom; during work-hours I walked solitary round and round the playground. I was expected to "confess" the crime of which I was not only innocent, but unaccused.

This punishment, which I believe criminal authorities would consider severe on a poisoner, went on for a term and a half. I was, at last, threatened with expulsion for my refusal to "confess", and so dreadful a picture of the horrors

of expulsion did they paint me—the guilty wretch, shunned by his fellows, slinks on through life to a dishonoured grave, etc.—that I actually chose to endure my torture, and to thank my oppressor.

Physically, I broke down. The strain and the misery affected my kidneys; and I had to leave school altogether for two years. I should add in fairness that there were other accusations against me, though, as you shall hear, almost equally silly.

I learnt at last, through the intervention of my uncle, in a lucid interval, what I was supposed to have done. I was said to have tried “to corrupt Chamberlain”—not our great patriotic statesman, shifty Joe—but a boy. (I was 12 years old, and quite ignorant of all sexual matters till long after). Also I had “held a mock prayer meeting.” This I remembered. I had strolled up to a group of boys in the playground, who were indeed holding one. As they saw me one said: “Brother Crowley will now lead us in prayer.” Brother Crowley was too wary, and walked away. But instead of doing what a wise boy would have done: gone straight to the head, and accused them of forty-six distinct unmentionable crimes, I let things slide. So, fearing that I might go, they hurried off themselves, and told him how that wicked Crowley had tried to lead them away from Jesus.

Worse, I had called Page 1 a Pharisee. That was true; I had said it. Dreadful of me! And Page 1, who “walked very close to Jesus”, of course went and told.

Yes, they all walked very close to Jesus—as close as Judas did.

4. A boy named Barton was sentenced to 120 strokes of the cane on his bare shoulders, for some petty theft of which he was presumably innocent.

Superb was the process of trial. It began by an extra long prayer-time, and Joshua’s account of the sin of Achan, impressively read. Next, an hour

or two about the Lord's care of the school, the way He brought sin to light. Next, when well worked up, and all our nerves on the jump, who stole what? Silence. Next, the Lord's care in providing a witness—like the witnesses against Naboth! Then the witness and his story, as smooth as a policeman's. Next, sentence. Last, execution, with intervals of prayer!

Champney's physique being impaired, one may suppose by his excessive devotion of Jesus, he arranged to give 60 strokes one day, and 60 the next.

My memory fails—perhaps Barton will one day oblige with his reminiscences—but I fancy the first day came so near killing him that he escaped the second.

I remember one licking I got—on the legs, because flogging the buttocks excites the victim's sensuality!—15 minutes prayer, 15 strokes of the cane, 15 minutes more prayer, 15 more strokes—and more prayer to top it!

5. On Sunday the day was devoted to "religion." Morning prayers and sermon (about 45 Min). Morning "Meeting" (1 1/2 to 2 hrs.). Open-air preaching on Parker's Piece (say 1 hour). Bible reading and learning by heart. Reading of the few books "sanctioned for Sunday" (say 2 hours). Prayer-meeting (called voluntary, but to stay away meant that some sneak in the school would accuse you of something next day), (say 1 hour). Evening prayer and Sermon (say 30 Minutes). Preaching of the Gospel in the meeting-room (1 1/2 hours), Ditto on Parker's Piece (say 1 hour). Prayer before retiring (say 1/2 hour).

6. The "Badgers' Meeting." Every Monday night the school was ranged round the back of the big schoolroom, and the scourgings of Barnswell (Cambridge's slum) let in, fed, preached to, and dismissed.

Result, epidemics of ring worm, measles, and mumps.

Oh no! not a result; the Lord's hand was heavy upon us because of some undiscovered sin.

I might go on for a long while, but I will not. I hope there are some people in the world happy enough to think that I am lying, or at least exaggerating. But I pledge my word to the literal truth of all I have said, and there are plenty of witnesses alive to confirm me, or to refute me. I have given throughout the actual names, addresses and other details.