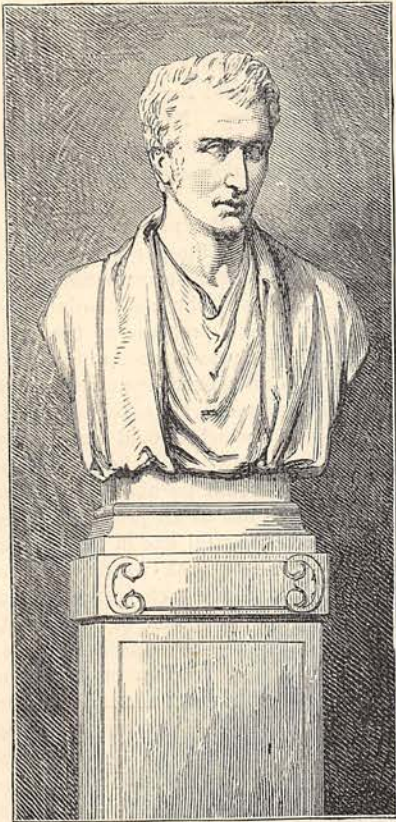


STIRRING SCENES IN STIRRING LIVES.

II.—SIR THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON.



THE BUXTON MEMORIAL IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

THE 24th of May, 1832, was a memorable day not only in the life of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, but in the history of the struggle for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. On the evening of that day he plainly saw that a certain step must be taken by him in the House of Commons, unless the cause of abolition was to be hopelessly postponed, perhaps lost for a generation. It was a step of pro-

digions and universal cramming, there are some persons who do not know that there were two great anti-slavery struggles in the early part of this century—the struggle for the abolition of the slave trade, and the struggle for the abolition of slavery. With the former we connect the name of William Wilberforce, its grand, intrepid leader, and along with him his associates, Clarkson, Babington, Zachary Macaulay, and others. After nearly twenty years of hard, unceasing warfare, the Royal Assent was given in 1807 to a Bill declaring the traffic in slaves to be illegal. Many important steps had to be taken to make this law effectual, and in particular a squadron had to be stationed on the West Coast of Africa, to deal with those who continued, in spite of the law, to carry on the traffic. It was only by degrees that our philanthropists began to find out that as long as there were slaves, the temptation to carry on a slave trade would be too strong for the knavery of the community to resist. Then they began to ask, Ought there to be slaves? At first, they were not prepared to say that there ought not, but there were certainly some things in their condition that ought to be amended.

To get their condition improved was all that our Christian philanthropists attempted at first. It was the stupid, senseless, almost devilish opposition of the West India planters to the most moderate and reasonable improvements proposed in the condition of the slaves, that drove our philanthropists at last to demand nothing short of entire abolition. That was the ultimate issue in the struggle, which ended, as we have seen, in 1833 in complete emancipation, although the planters got twenty millions by way of compensation for the loss of their property, while to the poor slaves themselves there was awarded, as compensation for all the hideous wrong and robbery that had been most ruthlessly inflicted on them from generation to generation—not one farthing.

When this new struggle hove in sight, about the year 1821, Wilberforce was turning old. He did not feel able to gird himself for the toils and worries of a new campaign. He saw that it was necessary, and that possibly it might be as arduous as the former one. So he looked about him for a successor, on whose shoulders he might lay his mantle. And he found one very unlike himself in one respect, very like him in another. Wilberforce was a little man, of whom Boswell, who was present when he addressed the electors at York at his first election, said: "I saw what seemed a mere shrimp mount upon the table; but as I listened, he grew and grew until the shrimp became a whale." Buxton, on the other hand, was tall and strong, the very picture of manly strength. But the two were very like in the depth and strength of their Puritan piety, and in the force and tenderness of their philanthropy. Buxton, in whom the blood of an old English family was tempered by that of the Society of Friends, and

When he rose that morning, he did not think it possible for him to hold on. The evening in the House was one of protracted anguish; it was such agony to go on hour after hour resisting the entreaties of his friends, that he felt as if he were having his teeth extracted (no chloroform in those days!) all the time. By God's help, he stood firm to the end. He insisted on putting the motion which he had made at the beginning of the sitting, and though it was defeated by a considerable majority, he gained a real triumph; the Government now took up the question, and in little more than a year, on the 28th August, 1833, the Bill for the Abolition of British Slavery received the Royal Assent.

To understand his position, and the glory of his act, let us briefly rehearse the history of the struggle. Probably, even in these days of competitive examina-

who, by his marriage with Hannah Gurney, a younger sister of the renowned Mrs. Fry, was further in touch with Quaker philanthropy, had been a few years in the House of Commons as member for Weymouth, and had excited great notice by a speech on the Reform of the Criminal Laws, delivered on May 23rd, 1821, described by Sir James Mackintosh as "the most powerful appeal that he had ever had the good fortune to hear delivered within the walls of Parliament." Next day, Mr. Buxton received a letter from Mr. Wilberforce, telling him how much he desired to bring in a measure for improving the condition of the negro slaves



SIR T. F. BUXTON.

in our Transatlantic colonies, and to find a member of Parliament who would be an eligible leader in this holy enterprise. After hearing his speech the night before on the Criminal Law, he could not doubt that he was the man he was in search of, and he earnestly besought him to give himself to this blessed service.

It was not the first time his attention had been drawn to the question. Buxton's sister was married to William Forster (father of the late W. E. Forster), who had besought him to take up the state of Africa and of the slave population in the West Indies. And his dying sister-in-law, Priscilla Buxton, knowing what had been proposed, sent for him as desiring to speak to him of something of importance. When he reached her bedside she was seized with a convulsive fit of coughing, which continued so long that her strength was utterly exhausted; unable to say what she wished, she just pressed his hand, and said, "The poor, dear slaves." Buxton, however, did not at once commit himself to the cause. He took some time to read and ponder, the more especially that he was alarmed lest any mismanagement of his should lead to an insurrection of the slaves, and if some 50,000 of them were to perish, would not their blood be on him? In the

autumn of 1822, he gave Mr. Wilberforce his final assent, and forthwith his leadership began.

His first motion on the subject was made in May, 1823, in the face of a request from the Government that he would delay. Mr. Canning moved an amendment, in principle agreeing with him, but declaring that any settlement of the question must contain a provision for compensating the slave-owners. Next year, however, when the resolution should have been enforced, Government would do nothing. Nor was the public very deeply interested. Other political questions, such as that of Catholic Emancipation, were engrossing the public mind.

We need not dwell on all the proceedings of the next nine years, the committee of inquiry, the violence of the planters, the death of the missionary Smith, the expulsion of the missionaries Knibb and Gardner, the public meetings, the rise and progress of the anti-slavery feeling at home. We pass at once to the crisis in 1832. The new elections had brought a considerable addition to the anti-slavery cause. Mr. Buxton determined to press a resolution which should not simply declare that the condition of the slave should be improved, but that slavery should be abolished. For this the Government were not at all prepared. The West India party was a powerful one in the House, and the Government did not wish to drive them into opposition. It was therefore earnestly desired that the anti-slavery discussion should be staved off. Buxton was most reluctant to embarrass his friends. But, on the other hand, the information he had from the West Indies showed that, notwithstanding all the brotherly exhortations that had been addressed to the planters for many years, the mortality among the slaves was greater, and therefore their treatment more oppressive than before. And if something were not done quickly, there might come a general insurrection, which would be attended by effects which one shuddered to think of. In spite of the requests of the Government, Buxton determined to bring forward his motion, and bring it forward he did.

The 24th of May was the day for its discussion, and seldom has any poor human being been more distracted than Buxton on that day.

After breakfast, he goes out with his daughter to ride. He cannot brace himself for the battle—it is too awful. He thinks of his friends being driven to vote against him, and so running the risk of offending their constituents and losing their seats. He is in an agony. But then he says he must think of the West Indies; he must remember what the missionaries and the slaves are enduring; he must not think merely of the suffering that comes under his own notice, but try to feel as he would feel if he were himself in the West Indies, and to act as he would consider the advocate of the slaves ought to act. The way of duty gradually clears before him, and his mind becomes settled. It is well the decision is come to, for as he rides back he meets some one every other minute, and is asked what he means to do, and when he tells them he is to stick to his motion and divide the House, they turn off in blank amazement.

A hasty meal at three o'clock ; to the House at four, his daughter and some other lady friends finding places in the ventilator—the only spot where in those days ladies could witness the proceedings. As they look down on the members they cannot see him for a long time. It turns out that he had been sent for by Lord Althorp, for a last, but still ineffectual, attempt on the part of the Government to get him to yield. The petitions are presented—many being anti-slavery, including a huge petition from the West Indies ; at last the order of the day is reached, and he rises to move his resolution.

Happily his style of speaking is mainly a dealing with facts, telling in themselves, and carefully arranged for the desired effect, so he escapes all risk of nervous confusion. He makes an excellent use of his materials, pressing some facts regarding the decrease of the population which have been questioned, with increased earnestness and decision. Mr. Macaulay follows with a brilliant oration. Lord Howick does not attempt oratory, but he tells the House that last year Mr. Buxton's assertions had surprised him, but he had made inquiry into the facts, and he found them undeniable. Then up rises Lord Althorp on the part of the Government. He is in sympathy with Mr. Buxton as to his object, but not quite as to his method, and he proposes an amendment which simply adds to Mr. Buxton's motion that regard be had to the resolutions of 1823. And now comes the tug of war. Members and friends of the Government beseech him not to divide on a trifle ; they hate going against him when their hearts are with him ; he is sure to be beaten, and in place of helping his cause, he will make a mess of it, and throw them all into trouble. Almost every friend he has in the House makes the same request. He said afterwards he thought there were a hundred who spoke to him. One member went to him four different times. Friends under the gallery were entreated to use their influence to persuade him to accept the one word "interest." Fancy his poor daughter in the ventilator, witnessing and watching the scene ! And fancy her recalling his words so late as that very morning, when he told her it was so painful he could not possibly hold out !

Poor child ! she knows him to be but mortal, and she can only make her appeal to the God of heaven to send him help from the sanctuary and strengthen him out of Zion. At last the debate comes to a close—he rises to reply. Thank God, after all, he stands

firm to his motion—alone, one would think, against the world. The Speaker puts the question—the Noes have it? Loud and firm is Buxton's almost solitary word of dissent—"No, Sir."

After an eight hours' debate, the House divides at two in the morning—the numbers are announced—90 for the motion, 136 against. It is a great minority in the circumstances, a moral victory, in fact ; but Buxton has offended all his friends.

For days after many of them cut him right and left. Never mind, thou fearless warrior ! Lord Althorp says to T. B. Macaulay, two or three days afterwards, "*That division of Buxton's has settled the slavery question.* If he can get ninety to vote with him when he is wrong, he can command a majority when he is right. *The question is settled ;* the Government see it, and they will take it up." And the Government did take it up, and in a year *British slavery was abolished.* How he continued to resist all the pressure was a wonder to himself. He felt with intense keenness the disappointment and pain he was giving to his friends. This was his weak point, and he knew it. But he had found a passage in his Bible which he read so often that the book would itself have opened at the place : "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us ; neither know we what to do ; but our eyes are upon Thee" (2 Chron. xx. 12). "I sincerely believe," he said, "that this passage was the cause of the division."

There were yet other fields where the battle on behalf of the slave remained to be fought. Buxton's attention was more and more called to Africa. Though the slave trade was now unlawful by British law, there were other nations that sanctioned it, and the horrors still prevailing were equal to any that the Parliament of Britain had dealt with. Buxton contributed his share to the measures deemed most expedient for suppressing the slave-trade throughout that continent. But never again did a day come in his life like that 24th of May. He helped on the good cause by his powerful advocacy, as other good men did, and more, perhaps, than any one else. But never again did he receive, Ajax-like, on his single shield the weapons of a whole hostile army ; never again, like Horatius, had he alone to defend the bridge. The firmness of one night secured the triumph of a noble cause, and earned the gratitude of 700,000 of his fellow-creatures, whom it rescued from the bondage of ages.

W. G. BLAIKIE.

ON THE NUTRITIOUS VALUE OF CERTAIN FOODS.

(FOOD IN ITS RELATION TO HEALTH.—IV.)

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

IN a former paper in this Magazine, I treated all too briefly on the adulterations of food. It is a subject to which I do not care to return at present, for it is by no means an inviting one. It

would be difficult indeed to name any kind of marketable commodity of an edible nature, that is not liable to be mixed or mingled with something or other which may render it more profitable to the vendor,