

STORY OF THEODORE PARKER

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Story of Theodore Parker by Frances E. Cooke

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FRANCES E. COOKE

**STORY OF
THEODORE PARKER**

LIVES OF THE GREAT AND GOOD

EDITED BY GRACE A. OLIVER

STORY OF
THEODORE PARKER



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STORY OF
THEODORE PARKER

BY
FRANCES E. COOKE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GRACE A. OLIVER

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS little story of Theodore Parker, by an English-woman, should find a place in our literature and have an enduring name.

She has skilfully woven a vivid, picturesque, and inspiring narrative of the events of Mr. Parker's life, without overstepping the bounds of natural and simple description. There is in it enough of imagination, of truth, of character-drawing, of incident, to put the salient points in the life and work of Mr. Parker clearly before the minds of all who desire a portrait of one who is called justly by our worthy critic and friend, James Freeman Clarke, "the ripe fruit of New England," who united "traits of common sense, joined with abstract speculation; sensibility of conscience, poised with calm judgment; the fanatic's devotion to ideas, with the calculating prudence of a man of the world,—which make the basis of New England character and its essential strength. . . .

"In looking for some illustration of this strangely exuberant and varied genius, I have recalled, as its best emblem, a day I once passed in crossing the St. Gothard Mountain, from Italy into Germany. In the morning, we were among Italian nightingales and the sweet melody of the Italian speech. The flowers were all in bloom, and the air balmy with summer perfumes

from vine and myrtle. But, as we slowly climbed the mountain, we passed away from this,—first into vast forests of pine, and then out upon broad fields of snow, where winter avalanches were falling in thunder from above. And so, at noon, we reached the summit, and began to descend, till we again left the snow; and so rode continually downward on a smooth highway, but through terrible ravines, over rushing torrents, into dark gorges, where the precipices almost met overhead, and the tormented river roared far below: and so on and on, hour after hour, till we came down into the green and sunny valleys of Canton Uri, and passed through meadows where men were mowing the hay, and the air was fragrant, not now with Southern vines, but with the Northern apple-blossoms. Here we heard all around us the language of Germany; and then we floated on the enchanting lake of the Four Cantons, and passed through its magnificent scenery, till we reached at dark, the old city of Lucerne. This wonderful day, in its variety, is a type to me of the career of our brother. His youth was full of ardor and hope, full of imagination and poetic dreams, full of studies in ancient and romantic lore. It was Italian and classic. Then came the struggling ascent of the mountain,—the patient toil and study of his early manhood; then the calm survey of the great fields of thought and knowledge, spreading widely around in their majestic repose, and of the holy heavens above his head,—the sublimities of religion, the pure mountain air of devout thought and philosophic insight; and then came the rapid progress, on and on, from this high summit of lonely speculation, down into the practice and use of life,—down among the philanthropies and humanities of

being,—down from the solitary, serene air of lonely thought, through terrible ravines and broken precipices of struggling reform; by the roaring stream of progress, where the frozen avalanche of conservative opposition falls in thunder to crush the advancing traveler; and so, on and on, into the human homes of many-speaking men, among low cottages, along the road the human being travels, and by which blessing comes and goes,—the road which follows—

‘The river’s course, the valley’s peaceful windings,
Curves round the cornfield and the hill of vines;
And so, secure, though late, reaches its end.’

Out of classic, Roman-Catholic, mediæval Italy, into Protestant Germany; out of the land of organization and authority into the land of individual freedom; out of the historic South, inheriting all treasures of the past, into the enthusiastic, progressive North, inspired with all the expectations of the future,—such was the course and progress of his earthly day. A long life, though closed at fifty years; as that day on the St. Gothard seemed to us already three days, long before sundown.”

The reformers of one age become the bulwarks of strength, the inspirers of truth, for the next, and it is only just and right that the generation now growing up among us should have the opportunity offered it of studying all phases of character in the great men who have worked for the progress of humanity. As this last biography of Theodore Parker says, “the memory of one whose reverence was so deep for the essential basis of religion should never die away; and no nobler example can be found in modern times of faithfulness to conscience.”