

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

BY THE REV. ROBERT JAMIESON.
(Continued from page 162.)

THE benevolence of the primitive Christians being thus readily, and on all occasions, exerted in the cause of suffering humanity, it need not surprise us that the most frequent and distinguished objects of it were the sufferers for righteousness' sake. Many of these were immured in prison, and no sooner did Fame spread abroad the sad intelligence that one of them was lying in the dungeons of a city, than the Christians of the place flocked in crowds to the doors of the cell, begging admission. Patiently did they bear the caprice and rebuffs of the surly guards and jailers; anxiously did they resort to every means of conciliation, by persuasions, entreaties, and bribes;—often, when all proved fruitless, did they lie for days and nights together outside of the wall of the dungeon, praying for the deliverance or for the happy and triumphant exit of the imprisoned confessor. If admitted, as they sometimes were, the Christians, most of whom were always women, carried with them beds, materials of food, clothing, and fuel,—they kissed their chains, washed their feet, and rendered them all the most tender and endearing offices they could think of. Witness the well known case of the impostor Peregrinus. This person, who lived in the second century, had been obliged to flee from his native country, Armenia, on account of some great crime, and having settled in India, became acquainted with the principles of the Gospel,—appeared an illustrious penitent, and made public profession of the faith. His fame as a Christian spread far and wide, and when his religious tenets brought him the distinction of imprisonment, the Christians, deeply afflicted at his fate, made extraordinary efforts to procure his release. These, however, proving unsuccessful, they strove to mitigate the evils of confinement by loading him with every attention. At break of day, numbers of old women, widows and orphans, were seen surrounding the walls of the prison, their hands filled with every delicacy, and even large sums of money, which the liberality of foreign Christians had sent to them for their support.

But many of the sufferers for the cause of religion, instead of being thrown into prison, were sent to labour, like slaves, in distant and unwholesome mines. Thither the benevolence of their brethren followed them, and never were contributions more frequently and liberally made by the Christians, than when they were destined for the relief of the mutilated martyrs, who laboured amid the darkness and noxious vapours of those subterranean dungeons. Nay, many even undertook long and toilsome pilgrimages, in order to comfort and support those victims of oppression with their Christian sympathy; and in the performance of these pious journeys, encountered perils, amid which nothing but benevolence of the purest and most exalted character could have preserved their resolution firm and unshaken. A party of Christians, for instance, set out, from Egypt in the depth of winter, to visit their brethren in the distant mines of Cilicia. Some of them, when the object of their journey became public, were arrested on their arrival at Cesarea, and had their eyes pulled out, and their feet dislocated. Others shared a worse fate at Ascaton, being burnt or beheaded. Various companies, who successively went from different quarters, on the benevolent errand of expressing their sympathy with the interesting miners, prosecuted their undertaking amid

similar dangers. But nothing could repress the ardent wish to pour the balm of consolation into the hearts of men, who were suffering the worst species of slavery for the sake of the truth. And highly were those honoured who lived to tell the tale that they had seen the martyrs in the mine,—to describe how they toiled, and wrought, and bore the chain,—and to carry, above all, the glad tidings of the fortitude, the patience, resignation, and Christian joy with which they endured their hard lot.

There was another manifestation of the benevolence of the primitive Christians, that deserve a particular notice,—their love for the souls of men. It was a remarkable feature of their characters, and though inseparable from the anxiety they displayed on every occasion to promote the best interests of men, it yet occupied exclusively the minds of some of them, and gave rise to exertions which nothing but interests of eternal moment could ever have originated. Not to speak of those who dedicated themselves to the preaching of the Gospel, there were many in private life who expended every thing they could spare from the bare support of life on the purchase of Bibles, and on every suitable occasion, distributed them to the poor,—a gift, the value of which cannot be estimated, without taking into consideration the scarcity and the immense price which in those days a single copy of the Scriptures cost. But, besides this excellent species of charity, which many of the wealthier Christians devised for themselves, there were others, who voluntarily submitted to the most extraordinary sacrifices, with the generous view of bringing men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. One man, for instance, is recorded to have sold himself into the family of a heathen actor, and continued for years cheerfully performing the most servile offices, till, having been the honoured instrument of converting the husband, wife, and whole family to Christianity, he received from the grateful converts the reward of his liberty.—And not long after, during a visit to Sparta, the same individual, learning that the governor of that city had fallen into dangerous errors, offered himself again as a slave, and continued for two years in that humble and ignominious situation, when, his zealous efforts for the conversion of his master being crowned with fresh success, he was treated no longer as a servant, but a brother beloved in the Lord.

Time would fail us to enumerate all the various channels through which the benevolence of the primitive Christians flowed. Some dedicated themselves to the task of searching out desolate orphans, helpless widows, unfortunate tradesmen, and heathen foundlings—in those times the most numerous class of unfortunates. Some carried their charity so far as to sit on the highways, or hire persons, whose office was to perambulate the fields for the purpose of directing wanderers, and especially benighted travellers, into the way; while others delighted to lead the blind, to succour the bruised, and to carry home such as were lame, maimed, and unable to walk.

Various were the sources whence the Christians drew the ample means necessary to enable them to prosecute so extensive a system of benevolence. The most steady and available fund was the common treasury of the Church, which was supplied every Sabbath by the voluntary contributions of the faithful, and out of which there was a weekly distribution of alms to multitudes of widows, orphans, and old people, who were stated pensioners on her bounty. In cases of great or public calamity, fasts were appointed,

which, by the saving effected in the daily expenses of all, even of the poor, were an approved and certain means of raising an extraordinary collection; and when that was found insufficient to meet the emergency, it not unfrequently happened that the pastors sold and melted the gold and silver plate that had been presented to their churches for sacred purposes. Many persons, too, were in the habit of observing in private, quarterly, monthly, or weekly fasts, on which occasions, they either took little food or none at all, and transmitted the amount of their daily expenditure to the funds of the Church; while others voluntarily bound themselves to set aside a tenth part of their income for the use of the poor, and placed it, in like manner, in the Church's treasury. Besides, there were many wealthy individuals, who, on their conversion to Christianity, from a spirit of ardent gratitude to the Saviour, sold their estates, and betaking themselves to manual labour or to the preaching of the Word, devoted the price of their property to benevolent purposes. Others who gave up their patrimony to the objects of Christian benevolence, chose to retain the management in their own hands, as for example, a rich merchant who with part of his money built a spacious house, and with the rest of it entertained all strangers travelling in his neighbourhood, took charge of the sick, supported the aged and infirm, gave stated alms to the poor, and on every Saturday and Sabbath caused several tables to be furnished for the refreshment of all who needed his bounty.

[To be continued.]

THE LATE DR. ADAM CLARKE.

[From the Rev. James Everett's new work, "Adam Clarke Portrayed."]

Adam Clarke's Boyish Philosophy.—There were few incidents in early life which escaped the recollection of Adam in its maturity; and fewer still, of an impressive character, from which he did not himself reap instruction, as well as casually employ for the benefit of others. A friend, with a view to heighten the pleasure of a meditated excursion, remarked to him "I thought, in my arrangements, that a Camera Lucida would be useful, as well as afford gratification, and therefore determined to bring one." The subject of this memoir, a little suspicious that, after all, it had been forgotten, inquired with some eagerness, "Have you brought it with you?" "I have not, Sir," was the reply. "Then do not tell us of our disappointment," was subjoined; tempering, however, the apparent hastiness of the answer with a practical improvement. "When I was at school, I lost a knife, and deplored it to a friend of mine, who appeared to sympathise with me; 'I wish I had known that yesterday, Addy,' said he, 'for I had a nice one, with two blades, and an ivory handle, studded with silver, which I would have given to you.' After working upon my feelings for some time, and thus heightening the disappointment, he at length dashed all my hopes by telling me he had no such thing. I felt so much on this occasion that I resolved from that moment never to tell any person what he had lost, by what he might have possessed, supposing the provision had been forthcoming." By a thousand boys this circumstance would have been soon buried in the oblivion of the past; and even in ninety-nine out of every hundred, who might have recorded the fact, no such improvement would have been made. But Adam Clarke had the power of making the uses of disappointment sweet, and of distilling good from everything; and although the friend for whose benefit the incident was related, had no cause for self upbraidings, as