

THE RAIL-ROAD BOY.

How often had I trodden of late that pathway with feelings of such intense interest and delight! I now traced it for the last time on that errand; my foot-steps had been urged on by the thought, "whom thou lovest is sick;" but now the real truth was fulfilled, and my interesting parishioner "was dead," yet did it seem scarcely more than "a taking of rest in sleep."

There is a feeling too much approaching the romantic in such scenes as these; they make after events appear insipid—there is something of self in them; but they do not often happen, and when they do, a heavenly and ever-watchful Father will overrule them for good. I felt just then disconsolate and sad, and thought I could never feel the same interest in another dying scene: I felt as if I had lost a dear and near relation; but O my Saviour, thou knowest the frailty of our human nature, and canst pardon and overrule the human frailties of thy people!

The week passed away—the many occupations of life did not serve to drive away for one half-hour the thought of that dying scene. The following Sunday was fixed for his funeral. He was to be buried by the parish. The afternoon service was over, and having taken off my gown, I walked slowly down the green lane that led to the cottage. It was a still, quiet afternoon; there was scarcely a breath of air, and the flowers were in full bloom; the scene around was beautifully still; the distant low of the cows, or the tinkling of the weather bell, were the chief sounds which were carried through the hot air—every now and then the deep hum of a bee or a summer fly passed swiftly by me.—The damp rose in hot vapours from the ground, and the hills of the neighbouring country closed in the view; a few little children passed me on their way to school, dressed in their clean Sunday clothes, and their school-books wrapped in white handkerchiefs in their hands; they curtsied as they passed, and their childish conversation for a moment stopped; the sound of their feet was soon lost in the many windings of the lane, and I was again alone.

The church bell had been tolling slowly for some time, and its solemn sound reached me at intervals—a remarkable contrast with the distant sound of the children's voices. There was grave and gay, life full of hope, full of energy, and death, to the eye of faith, more full of hope still. I grew late, and I sat down under the shade of an oak tree which overhung the gate of a field, from which I had a view of my church; the scene was very lovely, and I scarcely felt to care how long they were coming up. A boy or two, taking their walk with a bunch of sweet-williams or southernwood in their hands, passed and looked at me as they went, when at length the sound of voices in the distance broke upon my ear: I walked on, and presently in a winding of the lane saw the funeral coming, if at least it might be called by such a name. Four men carelessly and hurriedly carried the rough coffin, which contained the remains of him whose name almost seemed sacred to me; there were no followers; he had none to care enough for him; he was an orphan; but that mattered not to him. I could, however, scarcely think that that narrow home, brought along in such a manner, did indeed contain his remains; that under that lid, the sweet and placid countenance, the wasted form, over which I had so often bent, was stretched. I had seen him the evening he was placed in the coffin, and even then I scarcely could have thought him dead. A few village children on their way to school, had gathered in behind the bearers, and ran along with the quickly-moving procession; it was a parish funeral, and seemed to deserve from them less regard than usual.

I walked quickly to the church-yard, and met the body at the gate as they entered. The corpse was lowered; the dust rattled hollow on the coffin-lid; the children gazed into the grave, and ran to school; the service was over, and the bearers gone from the church-yard. I left the sexton to fill in the grave.—By the time I returned all was again quiet; no human being broke in on the perfect solitude of the church-yard; there was something in the silence more in keeping with my own feelings, than the heartless and professional carelessness of the officiators at a parish funeral. I sat by the grave till the bell rang for evening service.

Often afterwards I have resorted to the spot. The grave is now green; it lies unnoticed by the passing traveller, as possessing nothing more to attract notice above the rest of the graves; it lies in a sweetly retired corner, devoted to the repose of those who are buried on the parish account. I have often sat there, and, perhaps, often shall; it recalls feelings I would not lose for worlds. That grave contains one whose closing scenes are too deeply and too vividly impressed on my mind for me to lose them.

I have sometimes visited the old man since; he has never yet had another lodger, and the straw beds lie there as if he were still in the room. When I enter it, I can almost fancy I see his dying eyes fixed on me; but no, he has passed to a better world; the woodbine still tangles at the window, and the roses blossom at the porch. I love to visit the room and the parish grave; they seem almost to speak to me of the *Rail-Road Boy*.

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