

The Church.

THEREFORE I WILL NOT BE NEGLIGENT TO PUT YOU ALWAYS IN REMEMBRANCE OF THESE THINGS, THOUGH YE KNOW THEM AND BE ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH.—2 PETER, I, 12.

VOL. I.]

COBOURG, U. C., SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 1838.

[NO. XLII.]

Poetry.

CHRIST'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN.

He knelt—the Saviour knelt and pray'd,
When but his Father's eye
Look'd through the lowly garden's shade,
On that dread agony!
The Lord of all, above, beneath,
Was bow'd with sorrow unto death.

The sun set in a fearful hour,
The skies might well grow dim,
When this mortality had power
So to o'ershadow Him!
That He who gave man's breath might know,
The very depths of human woe.

He knew them all—the doubt, the strife,
The faint, perplexing dread,
The mists that hang o'er parting life,
All darken'd round his head!
And the Deliverer knelt to pray—
Yet pass'd it not, that cup, away.

It pass'd not—though the stormy wave
Had sunk beneath his tread;
It pass'd not—though to Him the grave
Had yielded up its dead.
But there was sent him from on high
A gift of strength, for man to die.

And was His mortal hour beset
With anguish and dismay?
How may we meet our conflict yet,
In the dark, narrow way?
How, but through Him, that path who trod?
Save, or we perish, Son of God!

MRS. HERMAN.

VILLAGE PREACHING.*

SERMONS TO A COUNTRY CONGREGATION.—By Augustus William Hare, A. M., late Fellow of New College, and Rector of Allon Barnes.

We have here two volumes of sermons preached by their author, the Rev. Augustus Hare, to the inhabitants of a small sequestered hamlet in Wiltshire, and published after his premature death as a legacy bequeathed by him to his parish. They are, in truth, as appears to us, on the whole, compositions of very rare merit in their kind, and realize a notion we have always entertained, that a style of sermon for our rural congregations there somewhere was, if it could be hit off, which in language should be familiar without being plebeian, and in matter solid, without being abstruse; that 'there was no need for the shepherd, in whatever wilderness his flock might feed, to let such lean and flashy songs grate on his pipe,' as are frequently produced under the title of sermons to a country congregation; and that with a little pains a quickening spirit might be introduced into the village pulpit, which should rescue it from the charge of dullness under which it has so long laboured, and render it a more effectual engine than it is, for impressing the people. But 'coughing will drown the parson's saw,' so long as a saw it is,—'the curate will enjoy the sweet sleep in his desk, and sweet, the clerk below,' so long as it is the *dreary* rector that draws over his head; and no wonder if the congregation is small, whilst it can be said of the vicar, as Sir Walter Scott writes of him, if we remember, in an early imitation of Crabbe,

"Dry were his sermons, though his walls were wet."

The observations, however, which we have to make on the subject of village-preaching in the abstract, will arrange themselves perhaps most conveniently under the several aspects in which we shall consider these sermons.

Now first with respect to *style*. The language then of a sermon to a country congregation should be of Saxon, not of Latin or French extraction. Your country congregation consists of the best and the worst educated people in the land, and the sermon should be so constructed as to be as far as possible alike edifying to both. The squire needs not to be revolted by its coarseness and vulgarity; or, which is more to be apprehended, be led to esteem it an effusion obviously intended for the poor to follow, and for him to patronize; and, on the other hand, the peasant must not be sacrificed to the refinement of his superiors, nor be made to feel that whatever scraps of saving knowledge come to his share, are but crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. But Saxon English has the merit of being at once acceptable to the highest class, because it is good in taste, and to the lowest, because it is intelligible in meaning; and thus both profit by it. It is the Saxon character of the language of the Liturgy that suite it to every congregation, from the parish-church to the chapel-royal. Were it saturated with terms of Latin or Norman origin, it would not be a whit more fit for a court, and would be utterly unfit for a cottager. Let no man despise the power of this dialect. Some of the finest bursts in our literature are in almost pure Saxon. Milton is never greater than when he is speaking in it. His noble sonnet on the massacre in Piedmont, contains scarcely a word which is not Saxon. His ode on the Nativity is of the same stamp; so are his *Alle-gro* and *Penseroso*. Crabbe's 'Hall of Justice,' and Cowper's 'Cast-away,' each the most powerful copy of verse, perhaps, which their respective authors penned, are monuments of the simple majesty of Saxon-English.

But were it less vigorous than it is, it is the speech of the people, and it would be a pitiful ambition in a minister of God to be playing the pedant in the pulpit, and to be painting the window

with he has dimmed the light. Let any man read the sermons of Parr, addressed to the good people in Hatton church, and he will see at once that it was as necessary for him to have spoken 'by two or three (sentences), and to have had one interpreter,' as it ever was for man who spake in an unknown tongue of old. It is not, however, pedantry, so much as a want of due attention to the vocabulary of the labouring classes, that render so large a share of what is provided for them quite useless, and we could name several publications on the list of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge which make no pretensions to learning, and of which the writers are above all suspicion of vanity, and yet which are lost upon those to whom they are addressed, because they do not speak to them in the vulgar tongue. Now it is a merit in these sermons of Mr. Hare that they speak in no other. For instance, on the reasonableness of the duty of obedience to parents—

"What plant from the Indies is so difficult to rear, or needs such constant care and watching, as a delicate, sickly child? Think of the wear and tear in the mother's heart. I have often seen it during that rearing. It is not the child bearing so much as the child rearing; it is the watching the cradle with patient eye, day after day, for hours together; it is the care and fear, and anxiety and weariness, while nursing children through their illnesses, that drives the colour from a mother's cheek, and makes it pale and wan before its time."

Or, on the Resurrection; thus the sermon opens—
"Christ is risen!" Such is the greeting in Russia on the morning of Easter day. In the great city of Moscow, and throughout the whole country, when two friends meet on this morning, one of them says to the other, "Christ is risen!"—Among all the customs I ever read of, this to my mind is one of the most Christian and most beautiful. It is the seeing the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its true light, not as a fact which we are merely to believe, because it is written in the New Testament, without thinking or caring much about it as a piece of good news to ourselves which we cannot help speaking of for joy. What the Russians then have said to each other on Easter-day for hundreds of years, let me now say to you; with a joyful and thankful heart, "Christ is risen!"

The most fastidious hearer could not find fault with such English, nor the most unlettered misunderstand it.

The defect of style against which we have hitherto directed our caution, the use of exotic diction, so fatal to the perspicuity of village sermons, issued from the school of Johnson. The next to which we shall advert, the use of *periphrasis*, from that of Gibbon. Gibbon's fondness for this figure is quite unaccountable, driving him as it often does, to the clumsy expedient of explaining his own meaning at the foot of his own page, as if the text were to be the puzzle, of which the note was the solution. For example—

"After a war of about forty years, undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and terminated by the most timid, of all the emperors, the far greater part of the island submitted to the Roman yoke."

And then we are told beneath that Claudius, Nero, and Domitian are the emperors meant. In Gibbon this came of affectation: in such humble followers as Hayley (who is profuse in the use of it), of feebleness too, as the tumidity of the limb does but indicate the debility of the system. Affectation is bad enough anywhere; in the pulpit intolerable; and if the preacher, especially the preacher to a country congregation, does not put pith into his words, and "make them pierce as nails," they will scarcely find their way through an honest hind's or yeoman's head. Mr. Hare, who, throughout these sermons, gives proof of his intimate knowledge of the poor, derived from pastoral intercourse with them, never bewilders them by any such circumlocution, but goes directly to the heart.

"All extortion," says he, for instance, 'according to this rule, comes under the eighth commandment. So does the taking advantage of a neighbor's ignorance, or of his necessities, to drive a hard bargain. So do all those things which too many reckon fair, such as cheating the king's revenue, smuggling and buying of smugglers, poaching and buying of poachers: all these are breaches of the eighth commandment.'

Or again—
"There is hardly a poor person in these parts of England who does not get what our great grandfathers would have deemed to be luxuries. I will mention two of these—*tea* and *wheaten bread*. If any one, a hundred years ago, had foretold that the time would come when every cottage in England would have its teapot and loaf of wheaten bread, he would have been laughed at as a foolish dreamer. Yet that time is come."

We have heard preachers in our time who would have finched from expressions so natural and straightforward; and would infallibly have warned these poor people on the Downs against holding any intercourse with the nocturnal marauder on the main or on the manor; and have suggested to them the gratitude they owed for a fragrant beverage and farinaceous food. And so might Mr. Hare, if his taste had been less correct, and his desire of doing good less earnest; and he would have had the comfort of thinking, after he had delivered his discourse, that though he had left his Wiltshire peasants in the dark, to be sure, as to the offences they were to shun, or the blessings for which they were to be thankful, yet the dignity of the pulpit, at any rate, had not suffered in his hands.

We next come to the use of *illustrations* in a sermon. 'The country parson in preaching,' says Herbert, 'sometimes tells the people stories, and sayings of others, according as his text invites him: for them also men heed and remember better than

exhortations, which though earnest, yet often die with the sermon, especially with country people, which are thick and heavy, and hard to raise them to a point of zeal and fervency, and need a mountain of fire to kindle them, but stories and sayings they will remember.'

Before the Reformation, sermons abounded in such tales; so much so indeed as to require regulations to correct the excess; as well as for some time after it. But in those days many causes concurred to render discourses from the pulpit more colloquial. The chief preachers were the Friars; men who might take rank with our own Ranter. Their hearers were perpetually coming and going during the sermon, as suited their convenience, the church door open, and no ceremony used; often, indeed, it was delivered in the open air, at a cross, or from a window. If the audience laughed outright at a passage that pleased them, or coughed at one that galled them, no offence was taken, nor any scandal felt: the license of the church being pretty much the same as that of the play-house; for indeed the two reciprocated; the pulpit being always dramatic, the stage often theological. This freedom from all constraint, both of the teacher and hearer, became by degrees abridged; the country clergy rising in rank and education (for immediately after the Reformation they were very low in both these respects,) and so growing more fastidious, and a severer influence shedding itself both upon them and upon their people by the progressive ascendancy of the Puritan. Accordingly within a century after the downfall of Popery, we find Thomas Fuller—the last man, from natural temperament, one would have thought likely to offer a caution upon such a subject—saying of the 'faithful minister,' 'his similes and illustrations are always familiar, never contemptible. Indeed reasons are the pillars of the fabric of a sermon, but similitudes are the windows which give the best light. He avoids such stories whose mention may suggest bad thoughts to the auditors, and will not use a light comparison to make thereof a grave application, for fear lest his poison go further than this antidote.'

Preaching, therefore, now took an opposite tack, and from having been certainly once succulent, by the time of John Wesley had become sapless. This was one cause which rendered the new style of preaching adopted by him and his followers so attractive; the people not staying to examine whether the water wanted filtering, because their throats were dry through the drought which had preceded. The standard according to which the character of the imagery and diction of the pulpit of modern days was regulated, was not fixed before the divines of Queen Anne's time; as the vocabulary of poetry, according to Johnson, was not determined before the age of Dryden. In both cases, the restraint has been injurious to the subject of it. There was a Doric simplicity,—'wood-notes wild'—in the poets before Dryden, for which the greater correctness, it may be, of those who have since lived, is but a poor substitute; and there was a homely vigour in the sentiments and phraseology of the pulpit of the days of the First and Second Charles, which has been ill replaced by the decorous tameness of later times.

(To be concluded in our next.)

HOMER BIBLICAL.

NO. XI.

ON THE POETRY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

In directing the attention of my readers to the beauties of the sacred page, it would be unpardonable were no notice taken of the sublime and simple poetry which adorns it. On this subject, however, nothing original is attempted. The labours of Lowth, and the more recent invaluable additions of Jebb, seem to leave scarcely any thing now to be hoped for in this interesting field. And while I avail myself of what they have already done; I strongly recommend to the studious reader an attentive perusal of the works of these masters of Biblical literature.

I shall now offer a few introductory remarks on the subject of poetry in general, which will prepare the way for a right appreciation of the peculiarities of Jewish poetry. And if my observations appear somewhat dry and uninteresting, I must suggest that preliminary knowledge is not always the most attractive, yet it is certainly most necessary, in order to a thorough understanding of any science; and that although the porch of the temple may be itself destitute of decoration, we must pass through it, if we would feast our eyes on the splendid ornaments which grace the interior.

I remark, first, *That rhyme is not essential to poetry*.—In the days of comparative barbarism, nothing was esteemed poetical in our own country, which was not attended with a rhythmical jingle at the end of the lines. Even those who wrote in Latin must have this miserable cadence; and thus taught the grave and majestic language of Virgil to figure away in the dress of Harlequin. At length, however, English ears have learned that rhyme is not even necessary to English poetry: and a Milton and a Cowper have shown that a poet may, both astonish and delight, without the appendage of similar sounds at the termination of the couplet.

I would observe further, *That regularity of measure in the different lines is not necessary to poetry*.—The Latin poets adhered to the rules of prosody, which were laid down for reducing their poetry to the greatest regularity; and with us it has been usual to attend to this. But there are not wanting passages of decided poetic beauty which are quite unshackled by rhyming terminations, and quite independent of the rules of prosody. Take the following lines of Southey as a specimen:—

"How beautiful is night!
A dewy freshness fills the silent air;

*From the London Quarterly Review for July 1837.