

From the Christian Guardian.

THE PATRIARCH ;

OR THE LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS.

'Gently on him had gentle Nature laid
The weight of years. All passions that disturb
Had passed away.'

Southey.

Soon after my arrival in the State of North Carolina. I was informed of an isolated settlement at a considerable distance from the place of my residence. Its original elements were emigrants from New England: a father and his five sons, who with their wives and little children, had about thirty years before become sojourners in the heart of one of the deepest Carolinian solitudes. They purchased a tract of wild swamp encircled land. This they subjected to cultivation, and by unremitting industry, rendered it adequate to their subsistence and comfort. The sons, and the son's sons, had in their turn become fathers of families, so that the population of this singular spot comprised five generations. They were described as constituting a peaceful and virtuous community with a government purely patriarchal. Secluded from the privileges of public worship, it was said, that a sense of religion influencing the heart and conduct, had been preserved by stately assembling on the Sabbath, and reading the Scriptures, with the Liturgy of the Church of England. The pious ancestor of the Colony, whose years now surpass fourscore, had at their removal to this hermitage, established his eldest son in the office of lay-reader. This simple ministration, aided by holy example, had so shared the blessing of heaven, that all the members of this miniature commonwealth held fast the faith and hope of the gospel.

I was desirous of visiting this peculiar people, and of ascertaining whether such glorious and precious fruits might derive nutriment from so simple a root. A journey across that section of the country afforded me an opportunity. I resolved to be the witness of their Sunday devotions, and with the earliest dawn of that consecrated day, I left the house of a friend where I had lodged, and who furnished the requisite directions for my solitary and circuitous route.

The brightness and heat of summer began to glow oppressively ere I turned from the haunts of men, and plunged into the recesses of a forest. Towering amidst shades which almost excluded the light of heaven, rose the majestic pines, the glory and the wealth of North Carolina. Some, like the palms, those princes of the East, reared a proud column of fifty feet, e'er the branches shot forth their heavenward cone. With their dark verdure, mingled the pale and beautiful efflorescence of the white poplar, like the light interlacings of sculpture in some ancient awe-inspiring temple, while thousands of birds from those dark cool arches, pour their anthems of praise to the Divine architect.

The sun was high in the heavens when I arrived at the morass, the bulwark thrown by nature around this little city of the desert. Alighting, I led my horse over the rude bridges of logs which surmounted the pools and ravines, until our footing rested upon firm earth. Soon an expanse of arable land became visible, and wreaths of smoke came lightly curling through the trees, as if to welcome the stranger. Then a cluster of cottages cheered the eye. They were so contiguous, that the blast of a horn, or even the call of a shrill voice, might convene all their inhabitants. To the central and largest building I directed my steps. Approaching the open window, I heard a distinct manly voice, pronouncing the solemn invocation—'by thine agony and bloody sweat—by thy cross and passion—by thy precious death and burial—by thy glorious resurrection and ascension—and by the coming of the Holy Ghost.' The response arose fully and devoutly in accents of manhood, and the softer tones of the mother and her children.

Standing motionless that I might not disturb the worshippers, I had a fair view of the lay-reader. He was a man six feet in height, muscular and well-proportioned, with a head beautifully formed; from whose crown time had begun to shred the luxuriance of its raven locks. Unconscious of the presence of a stranger, he supposed that no eye regarded him save that of his God. Kneeling around him were his 'brethren according to the flesh,' a numerous and attentive con-

gregation. At his right hand was the Patriarch,—tall, somewhat emaciated, yet not bowed with years, his white hair combed smoothly over his temples, and slightly curling on his neck. Gathered near him were his children, and his children's children. His blood was in the veins of almost every worshipper. Mingled with forms that evinced the ravages of time and toil, were the bright locks of youth, and the rosy brow of childhood bowed low in supplication. Even the infant with hushed lip, regarded a scene where was no wandering glance. Involuntary, my heart said, 'shall not this be a family in heaven!' In the closing aspirations, 'O Lamb of God! that takest away the sins of the world have mercy upon us!'—the voice of the Patriarch was heard, with strong and affecting emphasis. After a pause of silent devotion, all arose from their knees and I entered the circle.

'I am a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I come to bless you in the name of the Lord.'

The ancient Patriarch, grasping my hand, gazed on me with intense earnestness. A welcome, such as words have never uttered, was written on his brow.

'Thirty-and-two years has my dwelling been in this forest. Hitherto, no man of God has visited us. Praised be his name, who hath put it into thy heart to seek out these sheep in the wilderness. Secluded, as we are, from the privilege of worshipping God in his temple, we thus assemble every Sabbath to read his Holy Book, and to pray unto him in the words of our Liturgy. Thus have we been preserved from forgetting the Lord who bought us, and lightly esteeming the rock of our salvation.'

The exercises of that day are indelibly engraven on my memory. Are they not written in the record of the Most High? Surely a blessing entered into my own soul, as I beheld the faith, and strengthened the hope of those true-hearted and devout disciples. Like him, whose slumbers at Bethel were visited by the white-winged company of Heaven, I was constrained to say, 'surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.'

At the request of the Patriarch, I administered the ordinance of Baptism. It was received with affecting demonstrations of solemnity and gratitude. The sacred services were protracted until the setting of the sun. Still they seemed reluctant to depart. It was to them a high and rare festival. When about to separate, the venerable patriarch introduced me to all his posterity. Each seemed anxious to press my hand; and even the children expressed by affectionate glances, their reverence and love for him who ministered at the altar of God.

'The Almighty,' said the ancient man, 'hath smiled on these babes born in the desert. I came hither with my sons and their companions, and their blessed mother who has gone to rest. God hath given us families as a flock. We earn our bread with toil and with patience. For the intervals of labour we have a school, where our little ones learn the rudiments of knowledge. Our only books of instruction are the Bible and Prayer Book.'

At a signal they rose and sung, when about departing to their separate abodes—'Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will towards men.' Never by the pomp of measured melody was my spirit so stirred within me, as when that rustic, yet tuneful choir, surrounding the white-haired father of them all, breathed out in the forest sanctuary,—'Thou, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.'

The following morning I called on every family, and was delighted with the domestic order, economy, and concord, that prevailed. Careful improvement of time, and moderate desires, seemed uniformly to produce among them, the fruits of a blameless life and conversation. They conducted me to their school. Its teacher was a grand-daughter of the lay-reader. She possessed a sweet countenance and gentle manners, and with characteristic simplicity, employed herself at the spinning wheel when not absorbed in the labours of instruction. Most of her pupils read intelligibly, and replied with readiness to questions from scripture history. Writing and arithmetic were well exemplified by the elder ones; but those works of science, with which our libraries are so lavishly supplied, had not found their way to this retreat. But among the learners was visible, what does not always distinguish better endowed seminaries, docility, subordination, and profound attention to every precept and illustra-

tion. Habits of application and a desire for knowledge were infused into all. So trained up were they in industry, that even the boys, in the interval of their lessons, were busily engaged in knitting stockings for winter. To the simple monitions which I addressed to them, they reverently listened; and ere they received the parting blessing, rose and repeated a few passages from the inspired volume, and lifted up their accordant voices, chanting, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.'

To be continued.

MEDITATION FOR EPIPHANY.

From Morning Thoughts, by Rev. J. Cunningham.

The star of Bethlehem no longer arises upon the path of the earthly pilgrim, to guide him to the presence of his God. But does not every orb of heaven appear to go forth charged with the same holy commission? Has not each 'a voice?' and do not all 'proclaim the glory of the Lord,' and summon us to the presence of Him who built the heavens, who threw the arch of fire over this benighted world, who said 'Let there be light, and there was light?' And if all these lights of heaven were extinguished, is not every object in the universe, and every incident in life, calculated to teach the same lesson, and draw us closer to the same compassionate Redeemer?—Welcome, then, prosperity, for it lifts the soul to the great Giver of our joys. Welcome, sorrow; for it guides us to the only Comforter.—Welcome, every star or every spot which marks the face of our heavens; for all seem to 'stand over where the young Child' is, and to guide us to his presence; all prompt us to approach Him, and to cast our 'gifts' at his feet. Thou Saviour of the miserable! every vicissitude of life, every turn in the restless wheel of events, prompts us to take refuge in thy bosom. But with what offerings, shall we approach Thee? It is not in our power to bring the gold and frankincense of an uncorrupted heart, or of a spotless life. We are by nature and by practice, 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' O welcome us, thou gracious Redeemer! as we are; wash us with thy blood, and sanctify us with thy Spirit. Admit us to lie at thy feet, to hear thy voice, to see thy face, and to rejoice in thy love for ever. Welcome us as we are, and make us all that we ought to be. The star of Bethlehem is set: arise on us, thou 'Sun of Righteousness,' with 'healing in thy wings.' Whatever has been our former distance from Thee, draw us nearer to Thee; and constrain us, by thine own gentle influences, to surrender ourselves a 'living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.'

That star of the East never gladdened my sight
Which poured on the path of the Magi its light,
Till they gazed with believing, adoring delight,

On an Object more wondrous and fair:

That midnight effulgence ne'er dazzled my eye,
Which suddenly streamed from the chambers on high,
While the voices of seraphs and harps of the sky
With melody ravished the air.

But, O my Redeemer! all thanks to thy love!
For us the fair day-spring has beamed from above;
Nor e'er shall the 'star of the morning' remove,
Till we reach the celestial abode.

Eclipsed is the beam which illumined their way;
But brighter and broader the heavenly ray
Which guides our faint steps to the regions of day.
To the sight of our Father and God.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Epistle. Rom. xii. 1. Gospel. St. Luke. ii. 41.

As the design of the Church, in all her proper services from Christmas to Epiphany, appears to be to set forth the humanity of the Saviour, and to manifest him in the flesh: so, during the Sundays after Epiphany her design appears to be to display his divinity, by recounting to us in the Gospels, some of his first miracles and manifestations of divine power.

The Collect for the day first petitions God, 'mercifully to receive our prayers,' when we implore pardon for present sins—offer thanks for present mercies—and resign ourselves to him under present trials. It