

Poetry.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Star of the East, whose beacon light
A gleam on Bethlehem threw,
And thither by that wondrous sight
Arabia's sages drew;
On thee in thought we love to gaze
In western climes afar,
And think on thy mysterious rays,
Thou lovely eastern star.

Fair is the star of eve that sheds
Her light betokening rest;
And fair the morning star that leads
The day in glory drest:
But still more fair thy form arose,
And lovelier to behold,
Which of a more serene repose,
A brighter glory told.

Hail thou, whose silvery radiance led
Those Magian chiefs to bring
Their choicest gifts, in worship spread
Before Judah's King:
That glorious Sun, whose harbinger
Thy light was made to shine,
And like the pillar'd flame, to bear
Aloft salvation's sign.

Hail thou, appointed to adorn
The rising King of Heaven,
The promis'd child to Judah born,
The Son to Israel given:
In whom the peaceful empire seal'd
Should more and more increase;
In Him, the mighty God reveal'd,
In Him, the Prince of Peace!

So on thy beacon light we gaze
In western climes afar,
And note thy heav'n-directed rays,
Thou lovely eastern star:
With praise to Him, who in the sky
Thy wondrous cresset hung,
Prompt to inform the observing eye,
Apart from speech the tongue:

Him who permits to all to see
The light their stations need;
Who chose the star-verse'd sage by thee,
Star of the east, to lead;
Who made by shepherd swains at night,
The angel's voice be heard;
And gives to us his Scriptures' light,
His own recording word.

Saturday Magazine, 1833.

CHURCH CALENDAR.

Dec. 24.—Fourth Sunday in Advent.
25.—CHRISTMAS DAY.
26.—St. Stephen's Day.
27.—St. John's Day.
28.—Innocent's Day.
31.—Sunday after Christmas.

1833.

Jan. 1.—Circumcision.
6.—Epiphany.

THE PROFLIGATE RECLAIMED;

OR, THE HISTORY OF BOB SMITH.

"Bob Smith is come home, Sir," said my house-keeper one Saturday evening; "he was not expected until to-night; but George Brown, the guard of the Royal Charlotte, who was an old school-fellow of Bob's, overtook him on the road yesterday, when he was quite knocked up, and gave him a lift; so he got home the sooner. I hope he won't prove a trouble to his mother, poor woman. It would have been better for her, I think if he had not got off.

Bob Smith was the son of the hostess at the White Lion; and had been notorious while a lad for his profligacy. He was unquestionably the idlest boy in the school, and known to be a habitual liar. His parents had done every thing to reform him, but in vain. He had been twice before the magistrates at the petty sessions; once on the accusation of poaching, and once of theft; but though there was little doubt of his guilt, on neither of these occasions was he convicted. One night, after a strong expostulation from his father, he left home. He made his way to Liverpool, where he went on board a merchant-vessel, and was soon afterwards pressed. After remaining some time in the navy, he was out in a boat, with five or six of his comrades, and was taken by the enemy, carried into France, and detained as a prisoner. He was now set at liberty by an exchange, and lost no time in returning to his native village. He had not heard of the death of his father, until Brown, the guard, informed him. He had written to tell of his arrival in England, and poor Mrs. Smith was quite overwhelmed with joy at the prospect of again seeing him; for, notwithstanding his many faults, he was her only surviving child, and "she was a widow."

The return of Bob caused, as may be supposed, a considerable sensation in the village. A greater number of persons than usual called at the White Lion, and among them some of his old school-fellows; but Bob did not appear, much to the disappointment of those who wished to see him after his long absence, and to hear about Buonaparte and the French.

The following day, as I was leaving the vestry for the reading-desk, a paper was put into my hand. It expressed the wish of Robert Smith to return thanks to Almighty God for his great mercies lately vouchsafed to him in his deliverance from captivity in a foreign land. I was much pleased and interested with the circumstance, and, on entering the desk, I perceived Mrs. Smith in her pew as usual; for she never missed attendance on divine service, or suffered her worldly calling to interfere with her religious duties. The White Lion was conducted by her with great propriety; and Mrs. Smith testified how compatible attention to a business not very favourable for spiritual improvement, was with a strict observance of the law of God. Seated beside her, there was a sickly-looking, youngish man, whose clothes bore ample marks that they were not made for him; it was, in fact, a suit which belonged to his father. I had no doubt that this was Bob; and I was forcibly struck with his serious demeanor both during the prayers and the sermon.

"They say that Bob Smith is quite altered," said the clerk in the vestry after service, "and that he is now very religious. A sad chap he was; he tormented his mother nearly out of her life, and he heeded not the reproofs of his father. He seems, however, quite another thing now. I am sure it will do the Rector's heart good to hear of this; for seriously and kindly he used to speak to Bob, and warn him of the evil of his ways; and I did hear that Bob was much vexed when he was told that the old gentleman was away."

"I trust Smith is altered," I replied. "I am quite pleased with the public testimony of his gratitude to God. I should like to see him."

As I was returning the following day from a visit to the mother of a deceased young parishoner, I met Smith in the fields. He bowed most respectfully, and was about to pass on. I stopped and spoke. I was pleased with his civil manner, and expressed a wish that he should call at the rectory in the evening. He did so; and the visit was a most interesting one.

After alluding most feelingly to the fearfully wicked life he had led, in answer to my inquiries, he informed me that, while in the merchant service, he had been, on two several occasions, very nearly shipwrecked; and that while in the navy, he had been in two engagements, and had seen his comrades falling around him, while he was unhurt: but, notwithstanding his preservation, he confessed that he had never once thanked his Almighty Preserver. "I was, Sir, in fact, all this time living 'without God in the world.' I never prayed. I was noted for my profligacy amongst the profligates; for my profanity amongst the profane."

"But when," I asked, "did you begin to think seriously?"

"Not, Sir, until I had been in a French prison," was his reply.

"What led you, while there, to think on religion?"

"There was one of my comrades, a Protestant Irishman, who was taken prisoner with me, and who was known in the ship as the *saint*, and sadly persecuted he used to be reading his Bible, when he had a spare half hour. When on shore he would never keep company with the loose characters which swarm in our seaports, or frequent the low-tipping-houses, where the poor sailor often spends in a day or two all his hard-earned wages.—And yet he was the bravest fellow on board. Well, sir, two nights after we were in the prison, I exclaimed, with an oath, that we might be there all our days, and that probably we should be butchered to save the expense of our living, and that we had not a friend to look upon us, to pity and to relieve us."

"I think," says Jack Hill, for that was my comrade's name, 'you're quite wrong, Bob; I am sure we have a friend;' and he repeated a verse or two of one of the same Psalms read at church yesterday; and I confess I felt quite touched when I heard it."

"What was that?" I asked.

"It was from the 102d. 'He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. ***** For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.' My comrades and I laughed heartily at Jack Hill, even in the midst of our misery; and we told him plainly, we wanted to hear no more such methodical stuff. I can't tell how it was, Sir, but during the same night I had very little or no sleep, and I could not help thinking again and again on these passages of Scripture. Jack was lying near me fast asleep. I could not make it out. 'Here,' I said, 'is this fellow, that we used to laugh at for his seriousness, he is now far the most contented and happiest amongst us; surely religious people cannot be so melancholy.' The words that he had repeated occurred to my mind again and again during many days, nay, weeks; and when I used to see Jack reading a small Bible, which had been in his pocket when we were taken prisoners, I could not help envying his contentment, while my other comrades were cursing and swearing, and repining at their hard lot. I need not weary you, Sir, with my own affairs: I can only say, thanks be to God, Jack was the means employed by him to make me think more seriously; and it is my constant prayer that I may be humble and thankful."

I was much interested in this simple detail; and, on further inquiry, I found that Hill had died, after two years' confinement; that he had, in his dying moments, given ample testimony to the power of the Gospel; and that he had departed in peace.

He had bequeathed his Bible to Smith, as the only legacy he could leave; and I felt convinced that Smith was seriously impressed with a sense of religion. He expressed to me the unspeakable comfort he had experienced in reading the Bible and talking with Jack in prison; how many hours, that would otherwise have been solitary and gloomy, were rendered most delightful and profitable by communion with this true christian friend. He again and again expressed his thankfulness that he had been taken a prisoner; for, he said, "I am sure, if I had not, I still, if alive, should have been a wild profligate." I could not help thinking of the prison-house of Philippi, where Paul and Silas sang praises to God.

I took frequent opportunities of conversing with Smith; and I had no doubt of his entire sincerity. I saw the Bible which had been bequeathed to him, and it bore evident marks of having been no unread volume. The total change which had taken place in his character, was a wonder unto many who remembered him in the days of his youth, and his utter recklessness of all that was holy,—and a subject of ridicule to not a few. Some went even so far as to charge him with hypocrisy; and I myself felt that perhaps he used sometimes to talk of his religious feelings in a manner somewhat enthusiastic; and I was afraid lest he might be induced to leave my ministry for that of some sectaries, who dissented from the doctrine and discipline of our Church, and who were then very active in seeking proselytes. But Smith gave increasing evidence of sincerity and of attachment to the services of the Church. He proved a comfort and support to his mother during her declining years. He took a small shop, by the aid of some friends, and with a little money his mother had saved. The old Rector's liberality was, as usual, apparent on this occasion. By dint of industry, civility, and scrupulous honesty, under His blessing, for which prayer was

continually offered, Smith got into a decent business. The last time I saw him, he was clerk of the parish; undertook the gratuitous instruction of a number of poor children; and as the incumbent, with whom I spent a day, informed me, he was the great prop of all that was good in the parish. He had married a respectable and serious young woman, and had a large family.

In considering this case of *conversion*, for by no other name can such a striking change be described, I have often been led to admire the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty in overruling temporal calamity for spiritual and eternal benefit. The dreariness of a wretched prisoner, in a foreign land, was the scene of the richest blessings to the soul of this poor, licentious, depraved profligate. The word, "spoken in season," was instrumental in bringing this ignorant sinner to the saving knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; and he who entered the walls of the place of his captivity groaning under the bondage of a more fearful than any earthly slavery, that of Satan and of sin, departed from those walls rejoicing, not only in bodily freedom, but in that "wherewith Christ maketh his people free." I have often thought, when I have reflected on this incident, that we are, indeed, poor judges of what is good for us; and that the way wherely God leads us is indeed mysterious. How important, then, that we should cultivate patient submission, unreserved obedience to the Divine will; that we should cast our care upon Him who careth for us, and who bringeth good out of evil. It was a bitter portion in the cup of Joseph when he was sold as a bondman to the Ishmaelish merchants; but that very circumstance of his being carried into Egypt, was overruled by Infinite Wisdom for his exaltation in honour and power.

The change which was wrought on the character of Smith was a real, and momentous, and total change. It extended to his whole deportment, to his daily walk, to the minutest circumstances of his life. The mother, whose heart he had nearly broken, found him the solace of her declining years. She departed this life in the arms of that son who had long been to her as dead, but was alive again; who had been to her as lost, but had been found. The lips, that had opened only to utter the language of profanation, were opened to celebrate the praises of God. The house of prayer which had never been entered, was now the delight and comfort of the true penitent. The Sabbath of the Lord, once habitually desecrated, was now esteemed honourable and hallowed; and a life of many years, devoted in a comparatively humble sphere to the service of Jehovah, and in the furtherance of the best interests of his fellow-creatures, has afforded the most satisfactory evidence, that a great and saving change was wrought in this poor sinner's heart. And such a change, I would remind the reader, is nothing less than life from the dead. It is not mere reformation. It is not mere improvement. It is not mere amelioration of character, a more correct view of the duties of life. It is real conversion. "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."—*Recollections of a Country Pastor.*

If I meet a man with a beautiful pearl in his hand—he says great things of the brilliancy, value and beauty of this pearl—I follow him a little way—I observe him exchanging his pearl for a few poor pebbles; what shall I think of this man and of the value he set upon the pearl? Why, what I think of you who say great things of Christ, and part with Him for the poor baubles of the world; who talk much of his value, and give your hearts to some earthly pursuit or pleasure.—*Rev. T. Jones of Creaton.*

The Church

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