

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.



THE annual fair was being held at York, in the year 1776; and a number of young people had, as usual, assembled from all the neighbouring towns and villages, to witness its sports and engage in its revelries. Amongst the crowd of youngsters present on this occasion was the apprentice of a blacksmith in a village near Tadcaster—a tall, slim, rough-looking lad, but with a more gentle heart than is usual with those who work at the forge and anvil. He caught sight of a crowd at a short distance, and he went to see what was the entertainment.

A man was standing on a table addressing the people around him with great earnestness. As Samuel Hick approached, he caught the sounds of a hymn. This riveted his attention, for music had always a charm for his ears. So he decided to stay and hear what the preacher had to say.

Presently a gentleman stepped forward, and told the preacher that he should not hold forth there; and that he would pull him down. He advanced to put his threat into execution, when Sammy, whose blood was up at this interruption, clenching his fists, said, "Sir, if you disturb that man of God, I will drop you as sure as ever you were born."

Some time afterwards Sammy heard that the Rev. John Wesley was going to preach at Leeds. Distance was no object with Sammy, and he started off to hear the celebrated evangelist. On entering the chapel, he was deeply impressed with the appearance of that venerable man. The text was from James ii. 18: "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." It proved a nail fastened in a sure place to the young blacksmith. He came away perfectly convinced that he had neither faith nor works, but was a guilty sinner in the sight of God.

His father took a blacksmith's shop at Micklefield for him, and he began to work his way through the world when he was twenty-one years old. But little capital was required for his business. Having his tools, he wrought for his daily bread, which he always found to be forthcoming, and he had need of nothing.

Samuel considered that it would be well for him to have a wife. He had joined the rustic choir of Aberford church; and one day he saw there a young woman to whom he took a fancy. He went up to her and told her what he felt and thought. It may be well supposed that this sudden courtship filled her with surprise; but probably knowing something of his simple and impetuous character, she was not shocked. She listened, and listened again, till she began to think that he was in the right; and after some little experience of his society, she consented to a marriage. She was six years older than Samuel, but made him a loving and excellent wife;

especially as, by her prudence and economy, she counteracted the effects of his thoughtless generosity.

His union with Matty was destined by God to have an important influence on his history for time and eternity. They both had a certain fear of God and respect for religion; but neither of them had any practical experience of the renewing power of Divine grace. But his mother-in-law was a pious woman, and often spoke to her daughter and son-in-law about the one thing needful, and interceded for them before the throne of mercy. She was not permitted to see the fruit of her efforts during her life, but it was brought forth immediately after her death.

Three days after the good woman died, it seemed as if she appeared to Samuel in his sleep, and taking him affectionately by the hand, warned him to flee from the wrath to come; telling him that if he did not repent, he would never meet her in the paradise of God. The slumberer awoke in horror. He jumped out of bed, groaning from the anguish of his soul. His wife awoke in alarm, and thinking that he had been seized with sudden sickness, was going to call her neighbours. But Samuel withheld her, saying, "I want Jesus—Jesus to pardon all my sins." He was in great distress. "My eyes," he said, "were opened—I saw all the sins I had committed through the whole course of my life—I was like the Psalmist—I cried out like the jailor."

The penitent blacksmith knelt down on a "flag" near his bed, and there poured out his soul before a



prayer-hearing God. He had been taught the way of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had often been directed to the Lamb of God. He had heard of Jacob wrestling all night with the angel till he prevailed. He took the same plan. Heedless of cold and weariness, he continued on his knees through the dark hours of night, till he felt that God had mercy on him, and he had peace with heaven.

Samuel thought he could soon make all men believe like himself, and be joyful in the Lord. So