

From the Christian Guardian.

THE PATRIARCH;

OR THE LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS.

Concluded.

With the light of the early morning, I commenced my journey. Autumn had infused chillness into the atmosphere, and somewhat of tender melancholy into the heart. Nature seems to regard with sadness the passing away of the glories of summer, and to robe herself as if for humiliation.

As the sun increased in power, more of cheerfulness overspread the landscape. The pines were busily disseminating their winged seeds. Like insects with a floating motion, they spread around for miles. Large droves of swine made their repast upon this half ethereal food. How mindful is nature of even her humblest pensioners!

As I approached the cluster of cottages which now assumed the appearance of a village, the eldest son advanced to meet me. His head declined like one struggling with a grief which he would fain subdue. Taking my hand in both of his, he raised it to his lips. Neither of us spoke a word. It was written clearly on his countenance—'come quickly, ere he die.'

Together we entered the apartment of the good patriarch. One glance convinced me that he was not long to be of our company. His posterity were gathered around him in sorrow.

He was fearfully emaciated; but as I spoke of the Saviour, who 'went not up to joy, until he first suffered pain,' his brow again lighted with the calmness of one, whose way to eternal joy was to suffer with Christ, whose door to eternal life, gladly to die with him.' Greatly comforted by prayer, he desired that the holy communion might be once more administered to him and his children. There was a separation around his bed, those who had been accustomed to partake it with him, drew near and knelt around the dying man. Fixing his eye on the others, he said, with an energy of tone which we thought had forsaken him, 'Will ye thus be divided at the last day?' A burst of wailing grief was the reply.

Never will that scene be effaced from my remembrance; the expressive features, and thrilling responses of the patriarch, into whose expiring body the soul returned with power, that it might leave this last testimony of faith and hope to those whom he loved, are among the unfolding imagery of my existence. The spirit seemed to rekindle more and more, in its last lingering around the threshold of time. In a tone, whose clearness and emphasis surprised us, the departing saint breathed forth a blessing on those who surrounded him, 'in the name of that God, whose peace passeth all understanding.'

There was an interval, during which he seemed to slumber. Whispers of hope were heard around his couch, that he might wake and be refreshed. At length his eyes slowly unclosed. They were glazed and deeply sunk in their sockets. Their glance was long and kind upon those who hung over his pillow. His lips moved, but not audibly. Bowing my head more closely, I found that he was speaking of Him who is 'the resurrection and the life.' A slight shuddering passed over his frame, and he was at rest for ever. A voice of weeping arose from among the children, who had not been summoned to the bed of death. Ere I had attempted consolation, the lay-reader, with an unflattering tone pronounced, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.'

Deep silence ensued. It seemed as if every heart was installing him who spake; in the place of the father and the governor who had departed. It was a spontaneous acknowledgment of the right of primogeniture, which no politician could condemn. He stood among them, in the simple majesty of his birthright, a ruler and priest, to guide his people in the way everlasting. It was as if the mantle of an arisen prophet had descended upon him, as if those ashen lips had broken the seal of death to utter, 'behold my servant, whom I have chosen.' Every eye fixed upon him its expression of fealty and love. Gradually the families retired to their respective habitations. Each individual paused at the pillow of the Patriarch, to take a silent farewell; and some of the little ones climbed up to kiss the marble face.

I was left alone with the lay-reader, and with the dead. The enthusiasm of the scene had fled, and the feelings of a son triumphed. Past years rushed like a tide over his memory. The distant but undimmed impressions of fancy and of childhood—the planting of that one wild waste—the changes of those years which had sprinkled his temples with grey hairs—all with their sorrows and their joys, came back, associated with the lifeless image of his beloved sire. In the bitterness of bereavement, he covered his face and wept. The iron frame which had born the hardening of half a century, shook like the breast of an infant, when it sobbed out its sorrows. I waited until the first shock of grief had subsided. Then passing my arm gently within his, I repeated, 'I heard a voice from heaven saying, write from henceforth, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' Instantly raising himself upright, he responded in a voice

whose deep inflections sank deep into my soul, 'Even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.'

I remained to attend the funeral obsequies of the Patriarch. In the heart of their territory was a shady dell, sacred to the dead. It was surrounded by a neat enclosure, and planted with trees; the drooping branches of a willow swept the grave of the mother of the colony. Near her slumbered her youngest son. Several other mounds swelled around them, most of which by their smaller size, told of the smitten flowers of infancy. To this goodly company, we bore him who had been revered as the father and exemplar of all. With solemn steps, his descendants, two and two, followed the corpse. I heard a convulsive and suppressed breathing among the more tender of the train; but when the burial service commenced all was hushed. And never have I more fully realized its surprizing pathos and power, than when from the centre of that deep solitude, on the brink of that waiting grave, it poured forth its consolation.

'Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death. Of whom may we seek for succour but of thee, O Lord! who for our sins art justly displeased? Yet O Lord God most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death. Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts, shut not thy merciful ears to our prayers, but spare us Lord most Holy. O God most mighty—O holy and most merciful Saviour, suffer us not at our last hour, for any pains of death to fall from thee.'

Circumstances compelled me to leave this mourning community immediately after committing the dust of their pious ancestor to the earth. They accompanied me to some distance on my journey, and our parting was with mutual tears. Turning to view them, as their forms mingled with the dark green of the forest, I heard the faint echo of a clear voice. It was the lay-reader speaking of the hope of the resurrection. 'If we believe that Christ died and rose again, even so them that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.'

Full of thought, I pursued my homeward way. Iniquity, is devotion never encumbered or impeded by the splendour that surrounds her? Amid the lofty cathedral—the throng of rich-stooled worshippers—the melody of the solemn organ—does that incense never spend itself upon earth, that should rise to heaven? On the very beauty and glory of its ordinances, may not the spirit proudly rest, and go no more forth to the work of benevolence, nor spread its wing at the call of faith?

Yet surely there is a reality in religion, though man may foolishly cheat himself with the shadow. Here have I beheld it with simplicity, disrobed of 'all pomp and circumstance,' yet with power to sooth the passions into harmony, to maintain the virtue, in daily and in vigorous exercise, and to give victory to the soul, when death vanquishes the body. So I took the lesson to my heart, and when it has languished or grown cold, I have warmed it by the remembrance of the ever-living faith of those 'few sheep in the wilderness.'

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Epistle. 1 Cor. ix. 24. Gospel. St. Matt. xx. 1.

The Sunday next before Lent, being just fifty days before Easter, is therefore termed *Quinquagesima*; and the two immediately preceding are called from the next round numbers, *Sexagesima*, and *Septuagesima*, 60th and 70th. The Collect breathes a spirit of deep humility; a spirit more especially required at this time, when the Christian begins to call back his mind from the rejoicing season of Christmas, to prepare for the due and appropriate observance of the returning season of Lent. Under this powerful impression of self-humiliation, but with a well-grounded faith, we beseech the Almighty by every availing plea, to deliver us from the evil of sin. We plead his mercy—his goodness—his glory—and since all these would be unavailing, if we had not some one to put in the plea, and advocate the cause for us, we conclude by pleading his covenanted promise of Redemption through his Son, Jesus Christ. He is our final hope. All our pleadings must not only begin but end in him.

The Epistle is only to be explained by an observation of the customs in the Grecian games. A most striking circumstance in the comparison instituted by the apostle, is the difference between the crowns bestowed upon the conquerors in these games, and that reserved in store for them who shall finally overcome in the Christian conflict. St. Paul makes the observation, and founds upon it an unanswerable argument, why we should not suffer ourselves to be exceeded by them in the severity of our preparatory discipline, or the vigour of our exertions in the course of the combat.

'They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible;' and St. Peter speaks of 'a crown of glory, that fadeth not away,' immortal, ever blooming, a fine contrast to poor, fading, withering crowns of wild olive and parsley, for of these were the Olympian and Isthmian garlands composed. And if the great apostle of the Gentiles, with all his Christian attainments, and after all his labours, still dreaded lest, as the consequence of his relaxing, 'he should be a cast-away,' what cause have not we to fear, lest the like event should befall us? And what care and diligence can be too great in endeavouring to make good our progress in the race that is set before us. Like the race in the games, it must be run before the decision can be given.

Let us be sure to make a right use of the encouragement given in the Gospel to the labourers at the 'eleventh hour;' which must be done, not by rendering it an argument for presumption, to sooth us up in impotence or sloth, as if God were bound to receive us at what time and upon what terms we please. This is extremely to pervert the text, which tells us indeed, that call was the last; but it does not tell us that they, who refused his former calls, were called again and again. If this be done, it is grace and favour, not justice and debt. But we, who live under the ministry of the Gospel, have his calls daily sounded in our ears, and if we continue obstinately deaf, cannot be sure that our last call is not already over. The true benefit then arising from hence, is to all such as have had the unhappiness to lie long in sin and ignorance, that God will accept and reward them, though they come late into the vineyard, provided they then apply themselves heartily to their master's business, and work faithfully, to the uttermost of their power. Let us remember that the longer it is before we begin, the less day we have to work in, and therefore make the more haste to be ready for the evening, which draws on apace, when an account of what we have done shall be taken, and our wages awarded accordingly.

This is the true intent of the parable, in that part of it; so well does the Gospel fall in with the Epistle of this day; and both together so very well agree to fit us for the approaching time of mortification, designed to awaken the sluggish, to quicken the loitering, and set forward every labourer in this spiritual vineyard.—And, oh! that we all may receive instructions from hence, and be wise; understanding our advantages, and the goodness of our Maker; consider our latter end, the approach of that night, which must end in day eternal; the happiness of that approach to all diligent and faithful labourers, but the terror and dismal consequences of it to every slothful and unprofitable servant. To say all in a word; let us 'work the works of Him that sent us' into this vineyard, while it is day, before that time come, wherein no man can work.'—*Eps. Watchman.*

Roman Catholic Church in America.—This branch of the Roman Catholic Church comprises 1 archbishop, and 10 bishops. Little more than forty years have elapsed since the first see was created in the United States. The clergy are, at present, 327, who officiate in parishes, beside a large number employed in colleges, academies, and convents. There are 146 sisters of charity in 26 different institutions; and several other sisterhoods, chiefly occupied in the education of young ladies. The number of Roman Catholic colleges is 8; theological seminaries, 5; and convents and academies for young ladies, 29.—*Cath. Alm.* 1834.

Lutheran Church.—In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, there are 4 theological seminaries, 193 ministers, 630 congregations, and 59,852 communicants.—*Synod Journ.* 1833-4.

Pulpit Anecdote.—A popular preacher, by a pulpit exhibition of his wit to a country congregation, had particularly attracted the attention of a boy who was present. On going home to his mother, he exclaimed—"Well, mother, I shall never forget that preacher; he is the best of all I ever heard!" "Why so, my boy?" said the parent. "O, mother, because he was so very funny!" This anecdote, though short, may be a useful hint to ministers who are in the habit of indulging their natural levity in the pulpit.

Faithful preaching aims at humbling the sinner, filling him with a hatred of iniquity, and raising him from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, through Jesus Christ. To accept the Gospel, is to love Christ, to admire his perfections, to embrace his offer of pardon, and to live accordingly.