

## MY QUEER PARISHIONERS.

My queer parishioners were not irreligious. On the contrary, they attended church regularly—once a day in the winter, and twice a day in the summer. They partook of Holy Communion regularly, and were always ready to give a little towards any church work I might ask them to aid. And when, on my parochial visits, I would speak of spiritual things, and asked to be allowed to read and pray with them, liberty to do so was willingly accorded, and my heart would often be cheered by an unlooked for and, as some of my parishioners would have said, a very "Methodistic" response or exclamation. Without being told by them in so many words, I knew that they had accepted the Saviour each for his own sins, and I never came away from their society without feeling cheered and strengthened in my own soul.

Yet, their queerness continued. They still scrubbed the floors of their stable and cow-house, much to the benefit of the animals concerned. One brother always sold the hay, the other the wheat. The sister never sold anything, not even her eggs, honey and butter, but she always accompanied the brother who did so, and while all three maintained a strict taciturnity towards all others, they were well liked for their old-fashioned courtesy. If cheating were attempted, no sale, however far advanced, was continued, nor did the offender ever receive the slightest recognition afterward. They went to the post-office twice a year only, and at those times they received but one letter, the post mark of which was English, and it bore a large red seal. If they had a banking account no one knew with whom, and it was a standing wonder with a certain class of gossips where they kept their money, and whether they would ever be robbed or murdered on account of it. I could not have thrown any light on these matters, for I knew no more than the public.

Five years passed happily with me and my dear wife and children in our pretty parsonage. I had once asked leave to take Rosalind with me to see Miss Smith, but was met with a gentle though firm refusal. They saw no one.

I had also asked them to come to the rectory for a little change, assuring them they would meet no one. They desired no change. Therefore, I gave up all overtures and accepted the situation. During the fifth year my queer parishioners suddenly left off coming to church at all in the winter, and were not very regular in the summer. The cause was easy to discern, they were all getting too infirm either to walk or drive far.

Will Rogers was offered a five years' lease of the farm, with the exception of the fifty acres in which the house stood. The rent asked was high, but the land was worth it, and like a wise man Rogers accepted the offer. The cows were sold with the exception of one; the horses went with the farm, but one was to remain at the command of the house whenever he should be wanted. So the life of my queer parishioners became changed in spite of themselves, for who can resist old age?

One cold winter's night, of the same year I was sent for. Mr. Samuel Smith was ill and wished to see me. I found him ill, indeed. So fragile and worn he looked that I feared every breath would be his last. By his side sat his brother, Henry by name, and, busied in necessary duties, Miss Smith moved quietly about, ever and anon going to the bedside to smile upon or kiss her brother.

The room was very neat, but it was painful in its plainness. No carpet, one chair, one table (both home-made, evidently), a small chest of drawers, white curtains at the windows, a white quilt on the bed, this was all; it needed but a corpse under the sheet to complete its death-like aspect.

"I am dying, Mr. Caryll," said the sick man as I advanced, "and I want a confidential friend, not more for my own sake than for these," and he indicated both brother and sister. "They are willing you should be that friend, because we have all learned to love and trust you, knowing you to be a faithful servant of the Master's and, therefore, that you will be faithful to us."

He spoke slowly, clearly, apparently without effort, yet I feared every word would be his last, he looked so wan and weak.

"You honour me, indeed, my dear friend," I replied; "but I will not fail you in anything I can do."

"Sit down and listen to our story and then we will make a request of you."

I sat down, wondering what the revelation would be; whether it would disclose crime, sorrow, vice, or insanity, for all these I knew to be fruitful of romance.

"Take a little broth, brother," said the aged sister, holding a little bowl to her brother's lips. He drank, and wiped his mouth on a handkerchief of finer cambric than I had ever seen in my life.

"Thank you, Nanny. And now Mr. Caryll, my story must be short for I am weak. You can take notes if you like; indeed, I think you had better do so."

The aged brother gave a deep sigh and tears filled his eyes.

"It is nearly sixty years, Mr. Caryll, since Nanny, Harry, I, and our mother first set foot on the soil of Canada, nay, since we first set foot on this very farm, then a part of the great wilderness, a virgin forest.

"You know what our mode of life has been. It was always so, and of our own deliberate choice and plan. We were young, we loved life, we could have taken great pleasure in society, we had no grudge against our fellows, why, then, did we become recluses? I will tell you.

"Our father was a London stock broker and a wealthy man. He gave his children all the advantages of wealth—a good education, a happy home, and prospects sufficiently satisfactory for all reasonable expectations. There had been five children—two died young—so that there were but Nanny, Harry and myself when I was twenty-one. I had been to college and was home for my coming of age. A large party was given, and with my lovely and loving mother on my arm, I had been receiving the congratulations of our guests, among whom were some of the most prominent men and women in politics and literature of that day. Beautiful girls vied with each other in pleasing me, and happiness seemed to hold me by the hand. During the evening my father, who, always genial and hearty, was particularly so on this occasion, was called out of the room, and remained away so long that my mother whispered to me to seek him. I obeyed, and learning from the footman that he was in the library with a gentleman who had called on business, I proceeded thither. The room was at the end of a long corridor, for my father required perfect quiet when reading or work. But as I laid my hand on the lock I heard a loud voice saying:

"You will not help me, then?"

"I tell you, man, I cannot. I have money also invested in the scheme, which I shall lose."

"But you are rich and have more, while it is *my* all that is gone,—*my* all, I tell you, and it is your doing."

"Tut, tut; no such thing. I told you I was putting money into it; but no sane man puts his all into one thing."

"You said it was safe, and I believed you. Now it is gone, I am a ruined man, and my wife and little ones beggars."

"Well, well, man, its no use crying over spilt milk. We must take the world as we find it. Pray go home, Mr. Blank."

"Oh, my Helen! Oh, my children!" groaned the man, then suddenly changing his tones to one of menace, he cried: "I tell you, Hunter, if you do not help me to recover this loss I will kill you."

"Pshaw!" cried my father, "you talk like a madman. If you do not go I will have you put out."

"You will, will you! Never!" and before I could rush in two shots resounded through the house.

"The sight was horrible. A man lay at my feet as I entered, stone dead, and my father was staggering, as though he wished to reach the window. He fell into my arms, bleeding from a wound in his neck, of which he died in half an hour, not having spoken a word. I will pass over the horrors of that night, and the sorrows that came thick upon us. My mother was prostrate with the blow. For myself I seemed suddenly to become an old man.

"The suicide and murderer had spoken truly. His wife and four little children were left penniless, and had no friends to whom they could turn for help and protection. The poor widow died within a month. During that month my father's affairs were wound up. He had lost money in the venture that had cost him his life; moreover, he had left his business in a very unsatisfactory condition, so that, after the first wave of sympathy had spent itself, people began to say harsh things about him and to look askance at Harry and me. God knows, neither he nor we deserved it; but people can only judge from superficials, and when it was known that the suicide had ventured his all upon my father's representations, it was deemed no mitigation that he, too, had lost largely, and that his children's fair prospects were blighted by his murder."

Here the sick man gasped, and while his sister brought him a cordial, the brother lightened his pillows and besought him to rest.

"No! No!" he replied, "I will end the story, it is not long now, and then I will rest."

"Will you not let Mr. Harry tell the remainder?" I suggested.

"No! I prefer ending what I have begun. As I said, I seemed to be made old by the events of my twenty-first birthday, and instead of a merry, lively school-boy, Harry there became a saddened and changed man.

"The value of our father's will had depended on the success of certain business ventures, and these, more or less, fell through for want of his guiding hand. Yet, it seemed to Harry and me, that the suicide's widow and children had an undoubted claim on our estate, though the lawyers tried to reason us out of such 'utopian nonsense,' as they were pleased to call it. But we could see it in no other light, and finding that no more than a few thousands would be left when everything was settled up, we determined our plan of action for the future, providing our mother agreed to it. She was too heartbroken to argue and having always looked to our father for guidance, now turned to me, as his successor, to decide for her. The suicide's widow died, as I have said, within a month; but we took care that money should be supplied for all her needs, and, after the funeral, we executed a deed, placing four thousand pounds at the service of her four children for their education and support. This we put into the hands of a lawyer, who was to communicate with the guardian of the children, if there was any, and, if not, to act as guardian himself. We also executed another deed, binding ourselves to restore all that the children had lost through our father's advice to their father, since we could not endure the thought that any should suffer through him, who would no doubt have taken means to do justice had he been allowed to live. But, having done this, we had little left for ourselves. We had no business experience; and though friends of our father offered us various positions, we shrank

from them coldly, knowing that, though we were pitied, our father was in some sort held to have brought his fate on himself.

"We had heard of Canada as a land of great openings. We had health and strength and some money, and so we decided to emigrate. At first our mother demurred strongly. She felt keenly the necessity which it would entail of leaving the dust of him who had been all the world to her to the care of others. But Nanny supported our views, and at last we set sail. We would bury the past even so far as to change our name. We would let no one know who we were, so that our dear father's name should never be dishonoured by word or sign again. We would ask no one to associate with the children of a man who had been in the smallest degree blameworthy in the public eye, and we would work hard and pay all that debt to the orphans. Our mother died on the passage. It was a hateful journey then and a long one, and we had not taken one of the fast clippers, lest upon it might be found some one to reproach our father. We three landed alone at Quebec. We got good advice as to selecting a place to settle, and, as we had money, we bought our land out and out, with the house already upon it and ten acres cleared. It was hard work, but even now I recall with joy the happiness of the time. We were young, and except that we kept our vow of perfect seclusion, there was nothing to trouble us. Nature's beauties were on every hand, the land was our own, the air pure, the sky brighter than we had ever seen before, and God was above, where our father and mother were, for we never doubted that our father had meant to do right, and was the best of men. We think so still.

"You may be sure we sent nothing home towards the debt the first year, nor the second, nor the third; but we tried, and the fourth year were able, by great economy, to remit a hundred pounds to our lawyer, with directions to invest it in government consols and place it to the credit of the orphans. From that time we have regularly sent from one to three hundred pounds per year home, for as home we still regard it. Indeed, I doubt whether homesickness is ever entirely cured."

"But," I ventured, "at that rate you must long ago have discharged your assumed liabilities."

"You are right. Yet things have not gone so easily as you might imagine. The children grew up—three boys and a girl—lovely and well educated; but they gave us the anxious vicissitudes that parents generally have to bear, yet we were not the parents and so could not exercise parental authority. When it was found that the children were to be provided for, friends took a great interest in them, and some went so far as to fill their heads with much nonsense as to their rights and future prospects. Our lawyer had to interfere and prove to these foolish people that legally the children had no claim to the support they were receiving. This brought an end to the foolish suggestions, but in the mind of one of the boys they had already wrought evil. He had expensive tastes, and he gratified them—at our cost. Much legal correspondence had to be entered into, and our money seemed to melt away in fees. However, the boy at length saw his folly, and both the three brothers and the sister are prosperous and happy. The men—for they are elderly men now—are in business, capital accruing to them from their father's debt, which was equally divided as it gathered in the course of time. The sister's share was her dower and she married well. We have nothing now to regret; on the contrary, we are very happy. It has pleased God that we should live together—Harry, Nanny and I—through a long life, a very long life, for I am beyond eighty, and they are but a year or two younger. I do not say, Mr. Caryll, that happiness has been ours unbrokeably. Love, friendship, the family, have assailed us with burning arrows; but with the shield of duty and the weapon of hard work, we have quenched them—each for himself—never bemoaning, never regretting, always finding in each other the solace of a high and noble love. And now I have to ask my favour of you—our favour. There is money—a good deal of it—lying in consols to our credit, for it is ten years since the last farthing of our father's debt to the orphans was paid. I am dying, but these may live yet for years. I want you to take my place in a manner—to do the necessary business for my brother and sister, to see that they are cared for according to their infirmities, and, further, to be one of the executors of our will. Our lawyer in Z— will be the other, and we have agreed that the document shall be a joint testament, just as our lives have been joined together for so many years."

"Certainly, my dear sir, I will accept your charge gladly, and I feel proud and happy to know that you esteem me so highly."

"Harry, bring hither the will, if you please."

The invalid lay back on his pillows exhausted, but smiling, and took readily the little cordial his aged sister brought for him. It was a touching sight these three old people—martyrs, heroes, as they were! In my sight a halo radiated from each aged head, and I could scarcely refrain from visible emotion. In obedience to his brother's request Mr. Harry read the will. It was a marvel of precision and brevity.

The money in England was a little over a thousand pounds and was left to a charity there. The farm was to be sold at the expiration of the Rogers' lease, and the proceeds were to be divided between a provincial college and a hospital. A horse, mentioned by name, was given to me, as were all the books, and the secretary, if I cared to have it. The cows—five of them—also mentioned by name, were given one each to poor people in the district who had been known for their honesty and cleanliness;