

VILLAGE SKETCHES.*

THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN.

Amongst our many humble neighbours, resident in the straggling parish of W—, there was no one for whom I had a higher respect, and greater esteem, than for old Hannah B—. She was an aged widow, and had experienced many changes and crosses through a long life—a life of comparative poverty as to worldly endowment; but she was richly gifted with that greatest of blessings, a contented spirit.—Satisfied with the station in which it had pleased the Lord to place her, she was thankful for each and every mercy vouchsafed unto her; and how many a fellow creature, reared in the lap of worldly prosperity, might have envied the pious feelings of this humble Christian, and blushed for their own unworthiness. She was a daily lesson to me of the emptiness of this world's gifts, for the Spirit of the Lord was with her, and she lacked nothing.

Hannah B—, at the time I first became acquainted with her, inhabited a single room in the upper story of an old dilapidated tenement, whose ancient walls bordered on the village church-yard. It had once been a farm-house, but those days had long passed away, and it was fast falling to decay; very desolate it was to the eye, in every respect, both inside and out; the door creaked upon its rusty hinges, admitting a current of air into the little dark brick entrance, whilst the crazy staircase, which was very steep, seemed to totter under the weight of each falling footstep. The room was most forlorn in its appearance, for the old building was infested with rats, and it required no small effort of ingenuity to protect the trifling weekly store of provisions from these nocturnal intruders. The constant daily as well as nightly precautions necessary to be observed, in securing each article against such an armament, contributed greatly to the discomfort of the apartment; every thing seemed out of place, and there was a strange medley of pots and pans, chairs, tables, and tubs, placed in the very centre of the room, altogether looking the picture of desolation. In one corner was heaped a pile of sticks and fuel, the daily gathering of the poor old soul, and the whole collection was backed by one magnificent looking old log, which at last attracted my curiosity, as year by year my visits were paid, and still the old log retained its place in the usual corner.—“Ah! ma'am,” said old Hannah, in reply to my enquiry, “I do prize that old block of wood; it is many years now, but it was when my good man was in life, and we had more to spare then—more things like—but it pleased God it should not last, for we were burnt out one dreary winter's night, and few things were saved from the flames, but that one bit of wood came from the old place, and I have always kept it, for it is like an emblem of myself—a dry stick saved from the burning.”

The only companion of the poor widow's many lonely hours, was a singed, smutty-looking cat, who purled away her life amidst the embers of the tiny fire which lay smouldering on the hearth; and the only relief to the dead silence which reigned around, if relief it could be called, was the monotonous tick-tick of a large old-fashioned eight-day clock, in a huge wooden case, a remnant of somewhat better times, and as such, most scrupulously preserved, though I seldom found I could trust the treacherous dial as to its time telling veracity. Hannah had lost her only daughter, who died in the prime of life, of a lingering, painful disease, leaving a large family, some of whom, I fear, gave the poor old grandmother many a heart-ache. Her daughter's grave was close beneath the window of her solitary apartment, and poor Hannah often said, the thought cheered her through many a long dreary night, that all that remained of her dear departed child lay so near to her.

Poor Hannah's means were small; as long as she could do a day's work, she got employment from a kind-hearted farmer, on whose lands her husband had worked for many a year; but when, from age and increasing infirmities, she could no longer do any thing towards her own maintenance, her parish (for though so long resident, she did not belong to our pa-

rish), allowed her the trifling sum of eighteen-pence a week, a shilling of which went weekly to pay for her lodging. She had friends who gave occasional assistance, and with the hard-earned savings of a long life of economy, she not only contrived to live frugally—paying her way honestly, always appearing neat and clean in her apparel—but she absolutely contrived to save a little hoard of coin, which, by her request, after her death, we deposited in the savings' bank, for the benefit of a favourite grandchild. My poor old friend seemed the last link of the olden times, for she remembered our family through four, if not five generations, and her reminiscences were as original as herself. And I never paid a visit to her poor dwelling-place, without feeling humbled by her superior faith. In poverty and sickness, in pain and in sorrow, her voice was always to be heard uttering praises and thanksgivings for her numberless blessings. “God had been very good to her,” she constantly said, and though, the last years of her life, she was in a state of severe bodily suffering, from a painful malignant disease, which finally proved fatal, yet she never murmured or repined at this heavy affliction; which so bitterly tried the latter part of her lonely existence. “The Lord knows what is best for us; I am a poor, miserable sinner, but the blessed Jesus has redeemed us all, by his precious blood-shedding, and through his merits alone do I look for my salvation.”

She could not read, but her memory was so tenacious, that she could repeat a great portion of the scriptures by heart, and could always give a very correct sketch of the Sunday sermons. It was a bitter trial when her failing health, and increased sufferings, obliged her to give up attending divine worship, and she was most thankful to any kind friend who would read or converse with her on the holy truths of religion; she always said, if God took away one blessing, he sent another to supply its place. How few of the more favoured inhabitants of this earth would say the same! how did the pious, humble faith of this apparently deserted creature, shame the worldly trifler, whose constant repinings at some petty deprivation, we so often are called upon to deplore; for the sincere believer grieves for the weak in faith, always calling to mind that blessed saying, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

Crazy and dilapidated as the old house was, yet the aged widow was sincerely attached to it, and when there was a fear at one time, that, owing to the modern march of improvement, the ancient walls would not be spared, she was in much trouble at the thoughts of having to seek another resting-place. I asked her one day, what she purposed doing, in the event of the proprietor choosing to re-build and decorate his cottages? “The blessed Powers above only know where I can go, but it will be right, all right.”

It lasted her time however, and Hannah B— breathed her last, after much sufferings, in that desolate-looking room, blessing and praising God with her latest breath: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

The purring, whiskerless cat was taken away by a kind neighbour, who had attended the death-bed of the poor widow; the old clock ceased its melancholy tick-tick; and the much prized log was broken up by my husband, at the particular request of old Hannah, a very few days before she finally took to her bed—that bed from whence she never rose again—and a famous crackling fire we made of the long treasured relic; I much doubt if the old room had been the scene of such a blaze for many a by-gone year. I knew she felt she was going, when she quietly watched the destruction of that memorial of the past; though, as she quaintly observed, it was only of a piece with her other comforts, that even the withered emblem should be honoured in its end, for our old neighbour was much attached to my husband, and his name was the last earthly name she uttered ere her dissolution. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” and our humble Christian friend was sincere indeed in her earnest supplications for mercy at the throne of grace. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ arisen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep.”

Dear old Hannah how much we regretted her; it was a selfish feeling, for she is happier now, from the infirmities of the flesh, than in those when we know her in pain, and in sorrow, though never heard her express a wish to be released. “God's own time,” were the words always upon her lips. She had shown some anxiety, with respect to her burial; she was most anxious to have a decent funeral, and the wish was not forgotten; every thing was ordered and arranged in the most respectable manner, and flowers were laid in the coffin as sweet as her own calm, placid features, and as fresh and bright as her heavenly views were unto the last. “Behold, we count them but loss, which endure; ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

I have often and often thought over that venerable holy writ, after paying a visit to that poor lone widow, desolate and deserted in this life, as she appeared to us, yet who could for an instant doubt that her humble trust and steadfast faith were in vain? She thought of her own sinful nature, and utter unworthiness, magnified the few bright specks—which shone in the horizon of her existence; praises for blessings given, not murmurs for blessings withheld, were always to be heard from her lips, until her humble and contented spirit made me shrink from the recollection of the many undeserved blessings I enjoyed through the mercy of a munificent Creator, while this sincere worshipper of the holy truths of religion, lived on, neglected and overlooked in the busy haunts of life. What an awful responsibility devolves upon those who have both the means and the power to relieve the poorer brethren! If this responsibility were often considered, it would be well for us; how many sumptuous banquets, how many glittering carriages, how many fine houses, are frittered away in the glittering tinsel of this world's transitory pleasures—pleasures that leave no lasting satisfaction, that bring no consolation with this life's shadow, is fading away.

When Hannah B— was gone, we had lost the last link, as I have said, of the olden time; we had no successor equal to her in piety and godly love in our village—so faithful, so true to the end.

The nervous excitement prevalent in the present age, seems to affect all classes, and the tones of discontent are, I fear, too often sounded. The young expect more than they find, their tastes get more refined, even amongst the lower walks of life; this in itself breeds dissatisfaction, where the means are not equal to the demand, and leads too often, in the sequel, to sin and sorrow. Parental authority does not carry so much weight as it ought, every one thinks for himself, before the reasoning faculties are properly matured: Nothing is taken on trust; all requires to know the “why” and “because,” before obedience will condescend to bow its head, and doubts are often raised, and difficulties started, that a whole life is scarcely long enough to dissipate. The aspect of the political world is fraught with scenes of coming woe, and notwithstanding the vigorous efforts of the church to protect her own, how strong is the arm which would shake its very foundation!

These are amongst the many awful signs of the times in which we live—every thing progressing rapidly towards the fullness of time: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold, but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

MY SCOTTISH TOUR.*

THE PREACHING WEEK.

It was during a most pleasant tour, made some time ago in Scotland, and to which I always revert with pleasure, both from the exquisite scenery I witnessed, and the cordial hospitality and hearty welcome I received at many places on my route, that I arrived on a Thursday at a small town at the confines of the highlands, and situated on one of those lochs or arms of the sea which add so much to the Scottish scenery, and many of which afford ample means of conveying to the heart of the northern counties the comforts and habits of the south. I confess there is something not quite in keeping with the romantic

* From the Church of England Magazine.

* From the Church of England Magazine.