

## SCENES IN OUR PARISH.

NO. XIII.

## THE DAY'S WORK DONE

It matters not, so the work is done,  
At what hour sets the declining sun—  
If shadows come o'er him at noon of day,  
Or if he shine on to the evening grey."

It was the evening of a long summer day. The sun, which through all the waking hours had shone so brightly, had burned yet more brilliantly when he approached the horizon. The sweet peas and the roses that had glittered all the noon and the afternoon, were now folded up, and the tall evening primrose, and the June jessamine opened, as the fresh dew descended, and the still moonlight arose upon them. The last heavy wagon had passed. The last bustling sound had died away in the street—only now and then, the silence was broken by the lonely footstep of a late traveller. The very breeze that shut the convolvulus, and scattered the pure gum cistus leaves on the mown grass, told that the days work was done.

We had been a walk that evening and had stopped on our way, to look at Joyce's herbs, and were startled by her abrupt intelligence. "The dear old man's dead," she said; "the old man whose place you looked out in his book on Sunday."

"The old man dead!" we repeated. "The old man who sits at the top of the aisle? Why," I said, not caring that Joyce had made the same observation, "I found out his place last Sunday; he looked very well then." "Aye, so he was," said Joyce, "he was well at breakfast-time this morning so they tell me: and he died just after. 'What? he was quite well on Sunday, and this is only Tuesday?' Ah! what wonder is that? How long shall we be in learning, that in the midst of life we are in death. We could think of nothing else during our walk. The old friend was gone, whom we had been taught to love and reverence from our early childhood. We had learnt to consider it an honor to shake hands with him or to talk to him, and so indeed it might well be; for we knew him one of a race of kings, nay, a son of the King of kings, and if a son, then an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ. What a stupendous title, and how suddenly he had been called to his inheritance!

Notice for the celebration of the sacrament had been given in the morning—and as I thought of the small company whom I hoped to see there, old John naturally presented himself first. He had knelt in the same place at the north end of the rails, years before I was born, and since I had been admitted to a participation in the blessed privilege, I had never missed him there, and no doubt he fully intended to be present next Sunday. We shall be there I trust, and we will think of him when we pray for grace to follow their good examples who are gone before. But his labour is ended, he no longer needs refreshment by the way, for he has reached the city of habitation—his day's work is done! Death is at all times an awful thing, because it is a mark of a righteous God's displeasure against sin; but in some favored cases, the enemy appears so entirely a conquered enemy, the sting is so taken away, that our grief is exchanged for joy, and bursts into the involuntary exclamation, O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth the victory! And we prolong the shout, Victory! victory! through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The master of the vineyard in the parable, we know, gives to his laborers each of them a penny—to him who has wrought one hour only, as well as to him who has borne the burden and heat of the day; but I think that belief does not at all discredit the idea that an additional blessing of peace and comfort is permitted to those who have sought Him in the days of their youth—that, with regard to such as He has brought from their youth up, He will in an especial manner prove, that when they are old and grey-headed, he will not forsake them.

Our friend has been in an eminent degree an instance of such support. In his early days he learnt to know the God of his fathers, and even to his old age that God said, "I am He," and to his grey hairs, "I will carry thee!" It was the foolishness of preaching that was made strong for his salvation. And may I be pardoned here for referring to the venerable man—venerable for his worth as well as his grey hairs, and rendered yet doubly an object of interest by his blindness—who in this instance, and so many others, has been made the instrument of such incalculable blessing? Will it give him an additional subject of thanksgiving to learn, that one of whom he perhaps never heard on earth, loved and revered him as his best blessing, thanked God that he had ever heard him, and cherishing a deep, perhaps it might be thought a romantic, attachment even to the place where he had at first heard the message of salvation, to the last Sunday of his life attended the morning service there, though the distance was considerable, and received the sacrament there every first Sunday in each month—our own festival day being always on the last, perhaps if the old man had expressed them he might have told us of some particularly sublime feelings in his mind last Sunday, when, for the last time, he knelt in the place where the riches of the

gospel were at first made known to him; when he joined the worship of the Church militant so very few hours before he was admitted into the general assembly and Church of the first-born, the innumerable company of angels, in the Church triumphant.

As I told you when I mentioned him before, in my account of Whit-Monday, it had long ceased to be a matter of any importance to him, who preached, he had for many years been so completely deaf; but he has often said to me, looking up at our church walls, "It is my Father's house; I love to be there!" and O that house of his Father's which he has entered now; those walls not reared with hands, eternal in the heavens—how he must love to be there!

The religion of Jesus Christ is the one thing in this wearying world that ought to make people happy; yet unfortunately, owing not to want of power in that religion, but to man's want of faith in that power, it has not often its full effect; but old John always seemed as happy as possible. To the last week of his life he was an active and industrious man, and activity and industry are the second great causes of happiness. Not that he had for years been capable of a day's work, but what he could do, he did joyfully. It is but six weeks since that we were surprised by seeing him uninvited join our haymakers and work diligently on the top of the mow for a long time. We did not think it right he should be there, but he only answered our expostulatory signs (for we could not make him hear) with a merry laugh and increased exertion; and it was not till he had labored for four hours that at last he was prevailed on to come and rest in our kitchen. It was wonderful to see his energy; and in answer to the kind expressions addressed to him, implying fear that he had done too much, he answered, "It is what I always did love—hard work—but it's most done now—I've been round since to look at my grave in your church-yard. It's all ready now, and I am ready—my work is 'most done!' The tear would come into his eye in a moment, when he expressed gratitude either to his God or his fellow-Christians, but his habitual tone was one of joy. He had much comfort at home; for his excellent daughter over whose childhood he had watched vigilantly, repaired his care by constant attention and kindness in his old age. It was natural that she should make every effort to procure for him each blessing that affection could provide, whilst she felt that her neat and orderly household was blessed like Pharaoh's, for this Joseph's sake.

Some years ago, he had a severe illness from which no one thought he would recover, and he rejoiced and triumphed in the prospect of death, but he had then yet longer to wait. His work was not then done, and I remember the pleasure and respect with which more than one of the congregation welcomed him to his place on his recovery. It was a long walk for an invalid, and after church we used to take much pains to prevail with him to come in and take some refreshment.

When he did, his gratitude generally expressed itself in simple and earnest prayers for us, but he could not bear to intrude, as he called it; and would so often escape our importunities, by going out at one door when we were looking for him at the other; and so often, when we did overtake him, he excused himself in various ways, that at last we pressed him no longer, only leaving, I hope, the impression on his mind that we felt it a pleasure to do anything for him. Yet I well recollect how fervently, with closed eyes and lifted hands, he would thank God for what we set before him, and the courteous and almost graceful manner in which, before he drank, he used to wish us health and happiness. Indeed the old man's pleasant manner was one of his characteristics. I cannot understand how a Christian can be otherwise than careful never to give offence, and such care is the foundation of real politeness. O, Cowper made no mistake when he said,

"Smooth good breeding, supplemental grace,  
With lean performance apes the work of love."

There was more of real politeness in that old man's manner when he once attempted to congratulate me on an event of some importance to us—and the tears rose to his eyes, and he broke off abruptly, saying, "Well, God bless you! God Almighty bless every one of you!"—than ever the envious world would have expressed.

There was more of deep sympathy once on another occasion, when on looking at our mourning party, he attempted to offer no consolation, but he wept as he lifted up his eyes and raised his clasped hands in prayer to him whom he knew by long experience to be a sure hold, in the day of trouble; more than the thoughtless world could ever have offered. How should the gay and selfish world know the meaning of sympathy?

There is some charm in religion to still the passions, yet there is also something that keeps the feelings tender, even in extreme old age; and therefore it was, I suppose, that our old friend was so easily moved, that he always seemed so glad to see us, and received us with such a cheerful tone of kindness. It was difficult to hold any vocal communication with him, for having lost all his teeth; one could scarcely understand him; and as at the same time, it was almost impossible to make

him hear, he was so far prevented from any exchange of sentiment on earthly subjects, that his conversation might almost literally be said to be in heaven.

There was, however, no possibility of misunderstanding him, when holding your hand affectionately, he would smile as he looked up to heaven, and pointing upward say, "Going home, going home!" There was no mistaking when you met him in the church yard, and he pointed to the spot under the chesnut tree, and told you in the same glad tone, "I shall be there soon, very soon:" and if you happened to pass through the church three quarters of an hour or an hour before the service began, and you found him in his place; his broad old-fashioned hat and his stout walking-stick laid beside him, as he looked up from his large printed bible at you, and understood your look of wonder at seeing him there so early, the light and gladness in his clear blue eyes told, if his broken accents had failed to do so, "It is my Father's house! Here my Father's children meet—I love them—I love it—It is good to be here!" But my old friend had another way yet of expressing his feelings. His bible lay always by him, and sometimes, without attempting to make you understand him by words—an attempt which he had often found to fail—he would readily turn to whatever portion of the sacred page best suited him at the moment. I think I see him now, as he sat in his comfortable chair with his back to the window, so that the full light streamed over his grey head, and on the holy page of his bible, which lay upon his knees. Sometimes he had fallen asleep—"the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak," he had arrived at that time when "the grasshopper is become a burden"—he was eighty-five years old; and then the expression of calmness and composure was really beautiful; you recognised the stamp of "perfect peace," and lifted up your heart to God, acknowledging "because he trusteth in thee."—But oftentimes he was awake, and then, one after another, the variety of shades of thoughts and feeling that passed over his countenance were most interesting. The last time I remember seeing him at his own home, he beckoned to me, and turning over his bible leaves rapidly, pointed me to that verse in the 29th chapter of Isaiah,— "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book."—"Ha!" laughing for joy, "hear the words, hear the words! no deafness then!" It was no wonder if such an one was happy. He felt that the hand of a mighty God was with him, to keep him in all his ways, and consequently could know nothing of anxiety, and every blessing he received as coming from the kind hand of a merciful Father, and therefore was at peace.

"If I woke in the night" said his daughter, "I often over heard him praising and blessing God! If he came in tired from a walk, he would kneel down on his chair, and thank God for the rest he could take in it. If he did but take a draught of water, he would lift up his hands and eyes, giving thanks for it." It was only last Friday, that his daughter heard him in prayer thanking God for a mark of kindness that day conferred on him by his pastor. Only last Friday, and O, how far he is beyond our assistance now! What a little dim world this must seem to him! On Sunday, as I told you he went to a church at some distance in the morning, and came to his own corner where we have so loved to see him in the afternoon. It will be long indeed, before two neater or more respectable old men are seen in our aisle than those we have so suddenly lost—for I forgot to tell you, that good old Jacob, who stood god-father to poor Isaac's last child only on May-day, has been dead and buried more than three weeks. Well at sermon-time on Sunday, John came as usual and handed his great bible and, I marked the text—"They all with one consent began to make excuse." Dear old man! it did not apply to him. Monday passed as usual. "I had no thought of it," said his son-in-law, "when I passed through his room to go to my work at half past five—he was sleeping like a child." He breakfasted early with his kind daughter, and some time afterwards as he was accustomed, took his bible with him, and went to lie down on his bed. And there, a little after, his daughter coming up, accidentally found him. He had sunk down by the bed-side, and his bible had fallen from his hand, only at the moment in which he had no longer needed its guidance. He had obeyed his Master's direction, and his day's work was done. "So," as prays the pious Bishop Hall, "when I have worked enough lay me to rest; and when I have slept enough, awake me as thou didst thy Lazarus!

"We much wished to bury him on Sunday," said his daughter, "but the weather has been very hot, and it was found necessary that the funeral should take place on the second day after his death." In our climate such a necessity does not often occur; and the impossibility of getting her mourning ready added much to poor Hannah's grief, as it prevented her paying the last mark of respect—that of following the last friend to the tomb—which our people here are always anxious to pay. It was in consequence, a small though orderly funeral. The youngest granddaughter was the only female present, and she cried as if her heart would break; but the men were only serious, not distressed.—

Why should they? Themselves for the most part old and grey headed, they cannot have long to wait before their work also shall be done. O that it may be as well accomplished! that there may be as sure hope concerning them, as they enjoy with regard to this their brother, and then what need to weep? O when the last shock is borne in its season to the garner, ought it not to be with a shout of joy and thanksgiving?

But I have just been looking at our young gardener's favourite tiger iris, one of our most splendid and most short lived-flowers.

It is but just eleven o'clock, and already the tips of the crimson leaves are beginning to flag. The clear golden spots are as pure, and the polished centre as bright as it has been at all, yet a shade of decay has passed over it, which will every moment become more and more dense, and at noon its beauty will be entirely gone; and in one hour after, long before evening, it will be dried up and withered—and O I have lately seen something so very like that!

(To be continued in our next.)

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