

THE ANSWERED PRAYER.



It was a time of difficulty. Christmas had come and gone—in spiritual things a period of gladness, but, as worldly matters stand, not quite so “merry” always as it seems. At any rate, we were in great perplexity, for with the closing year the usual bills came in, and how to meet them was the question.

We did our best, however; all except a few were settled, but these fairly overtaken our means. We turned over this plan and the other. No, they would not answer; our family was large, our income small, and where was forty pounds to come from after all resources had been drained?

How well does memory bring back those days, when, side by side with memorandum lists and schemes of parish work, upon the wall of that small upper chamber I was using as my study, reminders of another sort were full in sight; for there, too, hung those still unpaid accounts.

Let me recall an early morning hour. I stood at the dormer window, looking out on the grey dawn that brought again to view our valley with its bordering hills. There was the ruined abbey gateway, and the monastery barn that told what great abundance had been held, and possibly abused, when the monks lived here in the ages gone. The broad meadow, sloping gently to the mill, still threaded by the stream that fed the ancient fish-ponds, shaded by those towering elms, through whose bare branches the dim sea outline showed.

However, all as yet was quiet in the village; an early cart or two had rattled by, and I had heard the labourers go up the lane to get things ready for the day. My work, too, must be set in order, and the Master's blessing claimed. I knelt before the Lord; and, among other matters (as was reasonable), the necessity oppressing us was much upon my mind in prayer. Here was a want we knew not how to meet; would He be pleased to guide us, as in former days, and to afford us some new proof of His providing mercy?

Family prayers were over; we were sitting round the breakfast-table when the postman came, and out the children ran to fetch the letters. There were three or four that morning, but one of them attracted more attention than the rest. It was directed in a sort of printing hand, meant, apparently, to tell us that inquiries for the writer were eluded. Could some anonymous epistle of wrath and blame have come to us at last? The envelope was opened, and within the same feigned hand was displayed. The note lies here before me, somewhat creased and faded, but still it fills my eyes with tears, so near akin are the tokens of our grief and joy.

“DEAR SIR,—Two of your brethren and neighbours, to whom you are personally all but unknown, out of respect for you as one faithfully devoting himself to the work of the ministry, have to request your acceptance of forty pounds, as their joint contribution to your finances, in the hope that your domestic comforts will thereby be increased, and your mind be rendered more free to attend to your great Master's work without distraction.

“Your sincere, though unknown friends,

“GAIUS AND ERASTUS.”

Such was the letter. Our secret benefactors we are not sure of to this day. But whose hand touched the springs of their benevolence? Whose providence ordered that exact amount to reach us in the very hour of need? Does not God answer prayer? Could I be surer of the fact if I had seen His hand stretched out from heaven? Might we not seem to hear Him saying, “Children, you have spoken to Me of your wants, and I send you a supply: here is the forty pounds that you require?”

Surely we gave Him our united praise; surely we felt encouraged for all time to rely upon our gracious Father in the skies, who holds the keys of all earth's treasures. And many a time since that He has made good to us His word of promise by Christ Jesus, “Ask, and ye shall receive;” and often has He shown that He has both the power and the will to “make all grace abound” to them that, in the path of duty, rest themselves upon His name.

AL-A-BAMA.

THE sun had set, and the warrior reposed, the wigwam was secured against beasts of prey, and night reigned over the pine forest of the West.

A hunter, late in his return to the village, and occupied in the disposal of the spoil, looked out from his hut before lying down to sleep. Something caught his attention; he sniffed and peered among the trees, and then climbed one in haste. One look was enough; he rapidly descended with a whoop of alarm that up-started neighbouring sleepers.

“Up, up, for your lives!” and a spear was darted at the door of a hut, caught again, and the speaker passed on, to repeat the cry wherever appeared trace of human habitation.

A sleepy squaw starts, and mutters indignant annoyance as she sinks to repose again.

“’Tis but some benighted hunter wantonly disturbing the peace,” suggests a warrior chief, turning on his mat, and resisting the desire of his sons to be up and after him.

“Is the enemy upon us?” whispers another, alert at the thought of a hostile tribe, suspected to be lurking in the forest.

Spears are clutched, quivers shouldered, bows strung instantly, and they wait and listen.

Again footsteps come, not with a stealthy tread, but quick and heedless, like the flight of the panic-stricken. Men, women, children, warrior, huntsman, mother,