

THE CHRISTIAN MIRROR.

DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF RELIGION AND GENERAL LITERATURE.

"MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE INCREASED."—DANIEL xii. 4.

VOL. I.

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1841.

No. 7.

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE FUNERAL.

Abridged from the Rev. F. E. Paget's "Tales of the Village."

LATE in the afternoon of a "brief November day," I found myself approaching the church of Abbot's Arderne, a village some two miles south-west of my own parish of Yateshull, and on the opposite side of the River Trent.

The day was not ungenial for the time of year—indeed, the air was soft and warm; but there is something of peculiar melancholy in that season, when the rich and varied hues of autumn having passed away, its sombre accompaniments only remain; when nature has not assumed her winter garb; and when, instead of clear bright skies, and frosty, but bracing and healthful air, dark, leaden clouds invest with one monotonous hue of sullen grey every feature of the landscape, or thick, penetrating vapours obscure it from the sight. It was so on the present occasion: the incessant rains and equinoctial gales had ceased; but the whole atmosphere was so overcharged with moisture, that the drops fell fast and thick from the boughs of the now almost leafless trees, and wreaths of mist hung upon the meadows, and followed the windings of the swollen river. All around me was dark and cheerless; and I felt the depressing influences which the sight of decaying nature can hardly fail to produce in those who rejoice in its opening bloom.

But if the day was melancholy, not less so was the task in which I was about to be engaged.

My friend Walter Lang, the vicar of Arderne, had that morning requested me to read the burial service over one of his parishioners—a lady with whom he and his family had long lived in such habits of friendship and daily intercourse, that he felt himself quite unequal to the personal discharge of the painful duty which had devolved upon him. Nor could I wonder at his distress; for the deceased Mrs. Fullerton was one of those persons whose loss is felt acutely, far beyond their own immediate household; and she had been cut off after a very few days of severe suffering, in almost the prime of life. Like the good Shunamite of old, she might have said, "I dwell among mine own people;" (2 Kings, iii. 13.) and her own people had daily experience of the advantages which that simple expression secured to them. Compassionate and kind-hearted, she grudged neither cost nor pains, whenever it was in her power, to alleviate the trials of those who were in sickness or sorrow. Courteous and gentle, yet sincere and open as the day, she said what she meant, and meant what she said. These were some of the qualities which endeared her to her dependents, and fitted her to discharge the duties of her appointed station.

She had, however, yet higher claims on our regard and admiration; for she was one of the humblest, most simple-minded Christians with whom it has been my happiness to become acquainted; and she was quite a pattern to those around her, in the quiet practical discharge of religious duties. Indeed, religion was with her the one object of existence; by this all the petty details of her daily life were hallowed; from this they all took their tone; to this all her thoughts and wishes (so far as human infirmity permits) were referred.

"And being such as this," thought I to myself, as I walked along, "how mysterious is the dispensation which has thus suddenly cut off such an exemplary person from the land of the living, while her light was shining so brightly before men, and she was adorning the doctrine of God

our Saviour in all things! 'Her sun is gone down while it is yet day'; and, oh, how sorely will its light be needed! Her boy, just of an age when such a parent's advice and guidance would be most valuable. Little Mildred Clifford, too, poor thing! deprived of a mother's care, and left, I fear, without a home or a friend in the world! Well, God's ways are not our ways, neither are our thoughts His thoughts!"

Thus musing with myself, I approached the churchyard of Arderne. The bell was tolling; the lich-gates were already set open for the admission of the funeral train; and to my right, a mound of fresh earth showed the position of the new-dug grave. I afterwards learned that it was by her own especial desire that no vault or resting-place within the church had been prepared for her; she desired, she said, "that no difference should be made between her remains and those of her fellow-Christians who were sleeping round her: earth should be restored to earth, and dust to dust."

It was a lovely spot, that humble cemetery. Yet, mingled with so much calm beauty, there was an air of solemn sadness around. The entire seclusion of the spot; the silence, unbroken save by the occasional tollings of the bell, and the cawing of the rooks in the adjoining grove; the sombre hue of the evergreens, which, for the most part, surrounded it; the heaps of withered leaves that strewn the ground on every side,—all these were calculated to impress the mind with grave and solemn thoughts, and to reiterate (though with small, still voice) the awful exhortation, to watch and pray, because we "know not the hour."

The funeral-train advanced, and I went forth to meet it. Mrs. Fullerton had been, as I have already intimated, in a special manner, the friend and favourite of her poorer neighbours. As of the patriarch Job, it might be said of her, that "when the ear heard her, then it blessed her; when the eye saw her, it gave witness to her; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon her; and she caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." And now, when her bounty and kindness had ceased, and when no interested motives for a show of gratitude could exist, they, whom that bounty had supported, or whose trials her many acts of kindness had lightened, voluntarily came forward to pay their humble tribute of respect to her memory, and of affectionate regret. The children whom she had taught at school, their parents, and not a few infirm, tottering creatures, who had scarce left their cottages for months, formed the rear of the mourning company. "Madam Fuller," they said, "had been a good friend to them and theirs, and they would even see the last of her."

Thus accompanied, the corpse was carried, for the last time, into the house of God; the service within the walls of the church was concluded; and then; once more, the procession was formed.

Hither the coffin is borne; it is lowered into its narrow resting-place; "earth" is consigned "to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust;" the prayers are concluded, the blessing pronounced, and the service of the church is over.

Then it was that the two persons most deeply concerned in this impressive and melancholy scene appeared to become sensible, for the first time, of its stern reality. Up to this time exertion was needed: and, no doubt, both of them had exerted their utmost for the sake of the other—Mark for Mildred, and Mildred for Mark: and so they had stood, side by side, their faces, indeed, buried in their handkerchiefs, but without that violence of outward grief to which undisciplined minds would have given way. When, however, the funeral-service ceased, and the crowd on either side fell

back, in order to allow the youthful mourners to take a last look at the coffin which contained the remains of her whom both had loved with the depth of filial devotion,—then it seemed that the greatness of their desolation burst upon them: for every tinge of colour faded from the lad's fine manly face, as Mark Fullerton drew Mildred's arm within his own, and led her forward to the foot of the grave: while she, brushing away with her hand the long, dishevelled ringlets of fair hair that covered her beautiful face, raised her eyes with deep affection towards him; and then, giving one long, piercing, agonised look into the open grave, hid her face in her hands, and sobbed as though her heart was breaking.

Oh! that last look!—the last!—even though it be in death and sorrow—the last look! how vividly is its remembrance borne in our bosoms while life continues.

After some brief pause, Mark and Mildred turned away in overwhelming grief from the spot where they had been standing.

"Ah, well-a-day!" I heard an old man exclaim to his lame companion, as I followed them down the church-walk; "well-a-day, Becky! if ever there was a good Christian soul, I do believe she lies in that grave yonder!"

"You may say that, neighbour; and what we poor creatures shall do without her, the Lord only knows."

"Ay, ay; many a comfortable bit and sup have we had from her kitchen, and many a yard of good warm clothing: more by token, she ordered Master Saunders to make this coat for me, for she said she couldn't abide my wearing such an old one on Christmas-day."

"Poor lady! she little thought then that you would so soon wear it at her burying," rejoined Becky. "We shall be sore losers now she's gone; for it's not like that they young things will take much thought about us poor folk."

"And that's true," said the old man; "they'll have gayer thoughts by and by, I'll warrant them, for all they are so downcast and tearful tonight."

"I'll tell you what it is, Simeon Clayton; they may be light-hearted again before long: they are young, and it is but natural; but they will never be as they have been: their eyes are opened this day, and they have learned what this world is made of—sorrow and trial for the young; and for the old, aches and pains, as we know full well, Simeon. God help us!"

"Yes," thought I to myself; "poor children, their eyes are opened today. There is no sorrow in after life like the sorrow of the first bereavement. Yet, bitter and enduring as is an early affliction, the lesson which it is calculated to convey is far more easily learned in youth than in maturer years. May the present grievous chastening yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby!"

With these thoughts in my mind, I proceeded on my way, enjoying the balmy freshness of the autumnal evening. A light air sprang up: the mist that hung upon the lowlands was dispelled; the sun, so long obscured, burst forth for a while, warming, cheering, invigorating the face of nature; and then, amid its cloudy pavilion of gold, and purple, and all other gorgeous hues, went down behind the roof of Arderne church,—appropriate termination to the scene in which I had been engaged—meet emblem of the rest of those who sleep in Jesus, and who, when their light has shone its appointed time before men, shed forth accumulated lustre in the moment of their departure, and then fading from before us, sink but to rise upon another hemisphere, and beam out with unfading splendour in a pure and cloudless sky.