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THE APOSTATE.

I HAVE sometimes thought that vicious example would be almost stripped of its pernicious tendency, if the public eye could follow the wicked into the recesses of their secret history. Although this is not a state of rewards and punishments, yet God so controls events that, even here, "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness," while "the way of transgressors is hard."

Upon the triumphs of unsanctified ambition, the accumulations of avarice, and the inviting pleasures of sensual indulgence, the young look with admiration: but could they see beneath their surface, and trace out the fearful retributions of sin, they would adopt the language of David, and humbly pray, "Gather not my soul with sinners."

The psalmist, in surveying the apparent prosperity of the wicked, was moved to envy; but his estimate of the desirableness of their condition, was materially changed, when, in the light of the sanctuary, he saw their end.

In the year 1831, the writer was the pastor of a church in the valley of the Mississippi. One pleasant afternoon, in the summer of that year, as he was sitting in his study, and looking out upon the beautiful Ohio, as its current swept slowly towards the "father of waters," he was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a beloved physician, who was also an officer in his church.

"Sir, are you too much engaged to visit your neighbor, Mr N., this afternoon? I believe he is dying."

Giving utterance to an expression of surprise, I intimated my readiness to go immediately to the sick chamber.

With Mr N. I had but little personal acquaintance; though I had long known something of his history. He was a native of New-England; the child of pious parents, who early taught his infant lips to pray, and guided his little feet into the sanctuary of God.

Endowed with a fine intellect, he made rapid progress in the acquisition of knowledge; and was considered, by his teacher, as the "star" of the village school. His head and his heart seemed alike to promise that he would do no dishonor to his friends or his country.

His approach to mature years justified these expectations. Of fine personal appearance; of buoyant spirits; of conciliating manners, and sober, industrious habits, nothing but religion appeared wanting, to render him all that his friends could desire. This crowning excellence of human character he professed to obtain at the age of twenty-one. That he was a hypocrite there is no evidence. That he was deceived, as to the reality of his piety, has been evinced by his subsequent conduct.

With the characteristic enterprise of the sons of New England, he early adopted the resolution to seek a milder atmosphere; a more fertile soil, and a wider scope for the exertion of his energies, than his native town could afford. At that time, reports began to spread over the east respecting the salubrious climate and luxuriant productions of Ohio.

It was truly represented as a land of the highest promise; holding out to emigrants the most tempting inducements to make it their property and their home.

Young N. did not hesitate long in deciding to throw himself into the tide of emigration which was flowing westward. He had already secured the affection and the plighted hand of Miss E. C., the daughter of a neighboring farmer. She had the rural beauty, the intelligence, modesty, and thrift, for which the young women of our country are distinguished. The proposition of her lover to read her "over the

hills and far away," had in it too much of romance and adventure, and too much of promise for the future, to be opposed. With the characteristic confidence of her sex, she cheerfully consented to leave the "sepulchres of her fathers," the warm friendships and the tender associations of childhood, the sympathies and endearments of her parental abode, to open new fountains of enjoyment in connubial love; and to find a new home in a wild and distant land.

The nuptials were solemnized, in the presence of many score of kindred friends. The bridal pair, and their youthful friends gave themselves up to unrestrained festivity; but a tinge of sadness appeared in the countenances of the parents. To them, those festivities of their children were like the melancholy smile with which nature is lighted up after a day of storms, when the sun gleams forth for a moment, and then buries itself in night. The parents hoped for the ultimate prosperity of the adventurous pair. They participated to some extent, in the high-wrought anticipations of the emigrants, but mourned the necessity of separation.

The day after the marriage was fixed for their departure. The vehicle for conveying themselves and a few articles of household furniture, and money enough to pay the expenses of the journey, with good health and industrious habits, constituted the wealth of the wanderers. Why should they despond? A thousand had gone before them, with no more capital, and had acquired wealth and respectability. They might do the same.

Nature demanded her tribute of tears, as the parting blessing was given; but the courage of N. knew no faltering.

A journey from New England to Ohio, in 1800 and 1836, were very different undertakings: "For," as an eloquent writer remarks, "our M'Adamized turnpikes, our canals and railroads, had not then, as they have since, broken the back of the Alleghanes."

In 1800, the passage of the mountains, thro' the state of Pennsylvania, was at once difficult and dangerous. But by perseverance and care, Mr N. and his young wife reached the lofty summit in safety, on the first of June. It was a lovely evening, when they paused a moment to quench their thirst at a little rivulet by the road side. This little stream had its origin just over the crest of the Alleghany, and leaped pleasantly along, to pay its loyal but diminutive tribute to the rivers of the West.

Mr N. stood for a few moments on the mountain-top. He looked behind him, and remembered the friends in his native village. By ascending the mountains, he was about to put a barrier between himself and all that he had loved, save the affectionate companion of his pilgrimage and sharer of his destiny. For a moment a tear trembled in his eye.

Mrs N. noticed his emotion, and, to divert him, cried, "What a beautiful sunset!"

The eyes of N. gratefully followed the direction, and gazed out upon the western sky. In the rays of the setting sun, it was smiling like the gate of heaven, and seemed to beckon him on to his still distant home.

Arrived at Pittsburg, he embarked on the Ohio, to be borne, by its even current, to his place of destination. At that period, the banks of this river were almost uninhabited. In floating along, at evening, the emigrant would be often startled by the howl of the wolf or the scream of the panther, as undisturbed, they ranged the extended and solemn wilderness. The Indians had been conquered, and taught to fear the pale men of the east; but they still retained a deep sense of injuries, inflicted by the whites, and were often seen wandering from their northern villages in quest of game.

The little vessel in which N. embarked, met with no accident. Its progress was slow; but this gave its passengers a better opportunity to admire the rich and diversified scenery with which the banks of the river are embowered.

Having sailed westward some days, Mr N. and his wife reached Cincinnati on the first of August, thankful that the shield of divine protection had guarded their journey.

They immediately departed for the interior, to seek for a farm; and in the rich valleys of the Great and Little Miamis they saw nature's productions on the grandest scale.

Here and there an emigrant had fixed his cabin; but their settlements were so widely separated, and so few, that the dominion of the wilderness seemed unbroken. N. gazed with astonishment and ecstasy on the evidence of inexhaustible fertility, furnished by the height and magnitude of the forest trees, and the rich luxuriance of the undergrowth.

With little difficulty he selected his farm. It embraced about equal portions of river and upland. The whole was gently rolling; but not so hilly as to interrupt easy cultivation. In several places on the high grounds, springs gushed forth, and foaming rivulets leaped, and danced, and murmured, like those he had left in his native land.

On this delightful spot he made a "clearing," erected a log house, and established his home. Before the constant labor of his hands the forest melted away; and in its place, were "hills speckled with flocks, and valleys waving with corn."

As years passed on, his plantation became girdled on every side with settlements. He began in solitude, but, by degrees, became again a member of society. True to his early instructions, and to his Christian profession, he had early erected a domestic altar. He had done more. He had invited his neighbors, in the absence of other means of grace, to assemble at his own house for worship; and this was both satisfactory and edifying to the plain people by whom he was surrounded. Oh that I could here pause, and draw a veil over the future history of this man; but the truth must be told.

His increasing wealth, his education, his excellent character pointed him out as a fit person for public offices. Once and again he came before the people as a successful candidate. Then his pretensions began to be opposed. More supple candidates entered the lists, who could drink and carouse with the multitude. This was a critical period for N. If he preserved his integrity, and remained firm in his principles, he would secure a good conscience; but he might lose his election—he might see spirits inferior in talents and moral worth, basking in the favor of the populace—while he was thrown into the shade.

The die was a fearful one—the struggle between conscience and ambition now excited to phrenzy, was severe; but it was short. N. had ventured within the charmed circle of the serpent; he was in danger; but had not sufficient energy to escape. A change rapidly passed over him. The quiet enjoyments of home were exchanged for the bustle of the village hotel. In the strifes of the political canvass, he hesitated not to employ the Sabbath, for drilling his men and arranging his campaigns. He still kept up a firm of family devotion—but the spirit had fled.

To please drunken voters, he must drink freely. To avoid giving offence to profligates, he must be careful how he adverted to religious obligations.

I will not follow him through all the steps of his downward progress. Suffice it to say, that he became idle and dissipated. Compelled to sell his farm, he removed to the city. There he set up a shop for the retail of potent spirits.