

THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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AN OLD CONVERT.

*Nor let the pastor's thankful eye
Their faltering tale disdain,
As on their lowly couch they lie,
Prisoners of want and pain."

Keble's "Christian Year."

Some years ago, we were surprised by noticing at the end of the roughest, and steepest lane in the parish, and joining to some ruined walls, which had formerly been part of a glass-house, symptoms of building. The persons who alone had any right to build on the ground, we knew were not likely to do it, neither were they to give leave to others; but it has ever been the fashion amongst our wild, gipsy-like of people, to collect stone and lime, and to build, and wait the chance of the lord of the manor's steward, or any one else to whom the right belonged, to call for the rent, and get if he could, afterwards. 'Build yourself a place, Jack, nobody'll meddle with you,' said some one, to whom the old collier had told the tale of grievances, which had caused him to quit his last habitation; so Jack and his sturdy helpmate began to build. The situation was beautiful, but they turned the back of the house to the view, for the steep banks that rise on either side, quite shut out any front, the lane itself, being, in the winter season, at least, but like the bed of a river. The ground on which the house was to stand, was so uneven, and of such small dimensions, that we were puzzled to think of what size the mansion was to be. A week or two, however, told us all we could ask. The four narrow walls, rose, lit, in front, by something like a window, and entered by a very low door, yet one that reached to the varied-coloured tiling of the roof. There was also a chimney, and that was, in fact, the chief distinction between the human dwelling place, and the habitation that the owner of it immediately provided for the couple of poor, spare asses, which he deigned to procure for them, among the scanty grass and fern of the hill side, and which constituted nearly all his worldly wealth. Of course, we very soon made acquaintance with our new neighbors; but, except as their ingenuity amused, and their industry pleased us, it was long before we found any thing else to interest us. They were very often out when we passed, so we had little opportunity of speaking to them; and when they were at home, the business of Jack's manner, (Joyce was always good tempered,) seemed to tell us that our visits were intrusive. It was vain to hope, that they might meet with instruction at church. If they thought at all on the subject, they fancied they were too poor to appear there, and too ignorant to profit if they did; but these are vain excuses. He that runs may read. The way-faring man, though a fool, need not err in the simple doctrines of our church; but there are thousands who still, sabbath after sabbath, refuse to receive instruction. The days of these poor people were drawing to a close. Still they rose early, and late took rest, and ate the bread of carefulness.—Oh! let us praise his mercy, who provides the unperishing bread so often, to those who seek it not.

At this time, great interest was excited amongst our poor people, to hear the new curate of the parish. It was not that the doctrine he preached, differed in any respect from that which had all along sounded from our pulpit, or that his manner was more earnest; but he was young, and had grown up amongst the people. He had never been long together absent from his father's flock, since the time he had been brought amongst them, as a delicate child. Every one knew his destination, and every one felt that he was growing up to think it an honor, to be even a door-keeper in the house of his God. The day on which he was to preach his first sermon, was naturally looked forward to, as an epoch of some importance, and the desire to hear some new thing, though not a legitimate christian motive, may be,

and sometimes is, over-ruled for good. Amongst the crowded congregation who attended our church on that interesting winter afternoon, we were surprised to see the architects of that strange habitation at the foot of the stony hill, whom we had before so often asked, in vain, to come. Now how far the effort they had made, was repaid, by what they could hear and understand, the first time, I cannot tell, but the next Sunday, and the next, there they were again; week after week, they seemed to understand a little and a little more than the last, for the word was adapted to their dull understanding, by line upon line and precept upon precept. At first, I suppose, they saw that the ministers were very serious and earnest; then they began to acknowledge a need of seriousness and earnestness. It struck them, as a new thought, that they were not to live in this world always; and if so, it was reasonable, that one day out of seven should be devoted to preparation for another. Then there arose an interest in the clergyman, and all his family. The old man, who used to be so rough, would watch for us now, as we past, to ask us in, and tell us that 'we were welcome at his house at any time.'

At this period, the school room was open from six till eight of a Thursday evening, as an adult school. You would smile sir, if I gave you some anecdotes, which would prove, with how much truth some of the scholars changed its name unknowingly, and call it "a dull school." Old Jack, at this time, had a great dread of being expected to learn, and at last opened his mind to us on the subject, and told us that his eyes were now too dim to make out the letters; indeed, he owned he never did take to book learning, even in his youth. But if he might come in and hear the chapter and the sermon, so he called the few verses from the Bible, and the simple exposition that closed the evening, he should be thankful. At his time of life, it would indeed have been a pity, to have deprived him of any means of grace, so the old man was admitted on his own terms. Every Sunday brought them regularly to their place in church, and some little outward improvement, as is almost always the case, was soon observable in them. The handkerchief was whole, or the cap or collar was cleaner, or the hair smoother. They never missed the Thursday school, but then they came, as all do, just as they can make it convenient from their work.

But the chief object of my writing, is to show, that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty: that if any be in Christ, how weak, how ignorant soever, he is, in good truth, a new creature. In this poor old man, the first observable change, as I have said before, was his growing regard to all whom he conceived servants of that God, without the knowledge of whom, he had been content to live so many years. Then he learnt to hate the sins, especially those of swearing and drunkenness, to which he had been so long a slave. Then came the struggle between old habits and new perceptions, between besetting sins and an awakened conscience. His minister told him that it was in vain to attend the worship of God on the Sunday, and live in rebellion against him all the week; he knew it was, but vices of seventy years standing, are not easily overcome. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? O the mystery of that 'clean water whose sprinkling maketh clean!' But though, as I said, the sin was not at once rooted up, it was instantly met as an enemy, always resisted, often overcome and every fall was deeply lamented. I can remember instances of the old man's watching for us, to confess how he had fallen. It was quite affecting to see so old a man so humbled; and he would send word to 'Master John,' such was the favorite appellation by which our poor people were accustomed to designate their young minister, to implore, whilst tears streamed abundantly down the rough and furrowed face, that he would not forsake him. No, poor, ignorant old man, there is one Almighty to save. He willeth not the death

of a sinner. He shall strengthen thee; yea, he shall help thee; yea, he shall uphold thee with the right hand of his righteousness. The neighbours soon perceived a great change in his language and manners, and his wife had cause to acknowledge that the fruits of the spirit are joy and peace, when she told us, that all the years they had lived together, they had never had so much happiness as now.

At length, after due consideration, poor Jack and his wife appeared at the holy sacrament, and it was a touching thing to see the young man who had been made instrumental in their improvement, assisting to distribute the blessed emblems of the Redeemer's love to such very aged persons, whose grey hairs, but for God's blessing on his ministry, might have gone down to the grave in shame and dishonor. The old man's strength now began to fail him. It became evident, that the oppression on his breath and the cough, must very soon prevent his climbing the hill to church. But he was in all the visitors' districts, for his lane led to three or four different parts of the parish, so he had constant attention; 'and there,' said the old woman, 'any body can read the word of God to us now, for there is a testament that he put there with his own dear hands. Master John gave it to us, and we have a right to love him, and we have a right to bless him.'

It was a great deprivation to the poor old man, not to attend to the public worship of God on Sundays, and his spirits were sometimes much depressed when he looked back with sorrow and shame at the long list of wasted Sabbaths, concerning which his conscience whispered. One circumstance occurred during the last few weeks of the poor man's life, of which I hope it will not be a breach of charity to inform you. As I have already observed, he had passed nearly the whole of a long life in ignorance and sin. Was it to be expected, that all the joy and peace in believing, which we should naturally look for, in the experience of the happy man, who had feared the Lord from his youth, would be his? He had complained to his minister, that he found difficulty in praying, that he could only say the same words over and over again; and his kind friend, after carefully explaining to him the real nature of prayer, as consisting not in words, but in the desire of the heart, proceeded, as he found that one form, at least—the perfect form, given by our master to his followers—was printed on this aged scholar's memory, to explain, sentence by sentence, at each of his visits, as fully as he could, the meaning of each petition. One day he found his old friend in great distress of mind. He had had a visit, it appeared, from a stranger, a dissenting teacher, who had spoken lightly of the instruction he was receiving; and very roughly questioned his grounds of hope. Amongst other things, he had touched on the subject that had before pained the weak old man—'Had he the gift of prayer?' He answered, that he tried to pray as well as he could, and that he could say the Lord's Prayer. 'That,' replied the self-constituted teacher, 'so the story was repeated to us, is not praying at all, you must learn a better way of praying than that;' and thus the mind of a humble and sincere, though very ignorant believer, was harassed, and shaken needlessly, and that, when he was even trembling in the valley of the shadow of death. Now sir, I live in the very hot-bed of dissent, yet have gone far from my usual mode in touching on the subject, my motto, with regard to my own beloved church, having long been, 'not drought upon others, but much dew on thee.' I know that charity suffereth long, and is kind, and would wish such charity to be exemplified in the life and writings of every member of the church of England; but I need not say to you sir, ours is a misrepresented, perhaps a mistaken church; once now and then, we need tell our own story.

Now we, who visited our poor old friend constantly, had the best reason to believe, that he did pray, and that acceptably. There was a gradual, but still