

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.

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GENERAL LITERATURE.

RELIGION IN ADVERSITY.

THE STARVING FAMILY.

[CONCLUDED.]

My dear kind husband, too good for a sinner like me, was carried off by fever in less than a month after we landed in England. We already begun to thrive. My dear departed John, on the day he sickened, brought home to this little boy a child's whistle—this, Sir, which you see (for the children grouped around us)—saying, 'Here, namesake, I have laid out twopence of my earnings to amuse you! but you must not play on it till to-morrow, for my head is like to split asunder from pain.' Alas! alas! that morrow came, and dear, dear John, was in a raging fever! six days more and he was a corpse! If any thing could have mitigated my affliction for such a loss—if any balm would have allayed the inexpressible pain of my heart—I might have drawn comfort from the truly religious manner in which he closed a life wherein the love of God and neighbour had shone bright and glorious.

He was attended by a clergyman of our own church; a pious feeling gentleman, who performed all his offices with true Christian charity, and only ceased to speak the words of consolation and precept to myself, when the vessel was unmoored in which I left England. But what consolation, what reflections, could recompense me for the privation I had experienced? My husband, my dear, dear husband was gone? Oh what could supply his place? Not surely empty words of sympathy?—and yet why should I call them empty, though they had been no more than mere words, for they flowed from full hearts; full indeed, they were of every human virtue. They came from the family of the clergyman who visited me in my affliction, and behaved towards me with a tender regard which I can never forget. God also raised up some other benevolent ladies who came to see me. They all wished me to remain at Workington, promising me needlework and embroidery, and after a short time the superintendence of a school likely soon to become vacant; for miserable as I must appear to you, I received an excellent education—(her language fully bespoke it)—and was accustomed to teaching. Advantages were also offered to my children, sufficiency to have decided any one but me to accept them.

But, strange to say, I determined from the first moment after the stunning effects of my dear partner's death had subsided, to return to Ireland. It seemed to my poor weakened brain as if every enjoyment I should have at Workington would be an offence against his memory and love. I know I was very wrong—and bitterly, most bitterly, do I lament my folly: but I could not help it; a power superior to my own will seemed to govern me. By day I thought, by night I dreamed. My dear husband was continually before my eye, warning me that ill betided my stay. The impression, far from losing its force, gained strength daily. At length it became intolerable, and

in infatuated defiance of reason, kindness, prudence, duty, and affectionate remonstrance, I set sail with these orphans, and another, who I trust is now an angel in heaven.

The ladies were greatly displeased with me; still they gave me some money, and clothes for these children, and with much excellent advice, wished me farewell. I came in a coal vessel, and had a tedious passage to Belfast. While there the Lord laid his hand on me once more. First my little baby, an infant of four months old, died of convulsions, without scarcely any previous illness, the day after we landed. I waited one other day to see the little innocent decently interred, intending to set out the morning after; but even while I stood beside the grave of my child, I was seized with shivering fits, and before night became so unwell, that the people of the house where I lodged, alarm by my appearance, insisted on removing me to the hospital. They abandoned this intention only on learning that that receptacle already overflowed, and could admit no more patients. Still, on finding the necessity they were under, they treated me and my children with all possible tenderness. Next day the fever showed itself in its plain character. In this dreadful disease I lay for three long weeks, during a part of which I was either insensible or delirious; and when I became convalescent, I was greatly annoyed by the return of hysteric attacks, which a fright I met with at the birth of my poor baby had occasioned.

As soon as I was able, and much sooner than it was prudent for me to travel, I commenced my journey with these poor children. Though I had practised all economy, and experienced much consideration at Belfast, my resources in money, and what arose from the sale of my clothes, were totally exhausted. I left a town wherein I had suffered so much affliction, with tenpence in my pocket, and with seventy long miles to accomplish before I should reach the end of my journey—namely, the residence of my mother—a woman far advanced in years, and labouring under many infirmities. Weak as I still find myself, and with these poor children to drag along with me, we have been unable to get forward in the direct line of our journey more than about five miles each day, and perhaps may walk nearly two more through fields and lanes seeking support and shelter for the night; which latter, the dwellers by the wayside have uniformly refused, and those in more retired situations only grant in their out-houses, such is the prevailing fear that wanderers like us may carry infection.

This is the sixth day since we began our pilgrimage; tomorrow, as your Reverence knows, will be the Sabbath. Neither I nor my children have tasted a morsel of food since this time yesterday, and although we have not been refused by any *poor body*—My fair autobiographer laid no emphasis upon the words, but my own conscience pointed them. The blood rushed into my cheeks like a fiery flood of lava; they seemed to swell as if the skin must burst; and eyes and forehead were equal-

ly burning. "Although," she said, "we have not been refused by any poor body, yet they often gave us only one potatoe, and that sometimes a *small one*. With such store collected during the day, we purchased a night's lodging, and supported nature as we best might. This day has been the most unsuccessful of all while a double need was before me. You, Sir, have seen what has happened to my little provision for the morrow."

She ceased, completely worn out, but evidently aware that her history had interested me, and that some attention was reserved for her for one night at least. I need not add, that her expectations were justified by the event. I lodged the wanderers in a cottage about a hundred paces distant from my own house. It was requisite to observe considerable caution in administering food to the entire party. Even the mother herself, when relieved from the burthen of care which oppressed her, seemed to forget the prudence which her delicate state of health demanded, and would have devoured, rather than eaten, whatever was set before her as ravenously as the most famished of her children. I attributed this greediness to the hysterical affection under which she laboured, and which I now perceived had caused the wild smile that had well nigh hardened my heart against all pity for her distress.

On further acquaintance, I discovered that she had been brought up partly by religious parents, but more importantly as it affected her ideas and manners, in the house of a very worthy gentleman's family, chiefly in the capacity of a sempstress. Rather with their consent than approbation, she married the miner, who established himself in a small farm under his wife's patrons. For some years they lived prosperously enough; but at length misfortunes overtook them; and after struggling with adversity as long as he could, he took the step with which the reader of this story is made already acquainted.

The children came uninvited on the following day to my Sabbath school. They were all more or less instructed in the Catechism of the Church of England, and habituated, as they assured me, to morning and evening devotions. They were, indeed, interesting manifestations of the value of maternal care and piety. Their mother and they attended Divine service, being somewhat improved in their apparel by the extempore contributions of my wife, whose wardrobe furnished a motley raiment to the seminudes. In apparent interest in the work of prayer, and in the word preached, nothing could surpass this poor creature's demeanor. The subject of my discourse bore occasional reference to the distress of the period, and therefore necessarily to the long separations of death. Many a fast flowing tear fell from her wan cheek as the sad topic was discussed. Alas! they flowed or fell not without cause. Behind her was the memory of lost happiness—before, a dark and melancholy future. Yet I believe, she rested her hopes where true joys are to be found, and, I trust, did there find a blessed substitute for those transitory pleasures she was no longer to experience here.