

THE LAST LEAF.

Some years ago, at one of the Irish Church Mission Schools, a boy, the child of very poor parents, was enrolled in a class for Scripture reading. He was quick, intelligent, and full of heart; but out of so wretched a home had he been brought, and so thick the gloom of ignorance with which his earlier years were pressed down, that it was a work of no small toil, at first, to teach him the beauty and charm of God's divine Word. However, light by degrees fell on the opening thoughts of the little scholar. His parents were Roman Catholics, and to them the Bible was a sealed volume; but to him, as he slowly drank in the truth, and thirsted the more, the more he drank, the Bible began to unfold very strange and heavenly lore. In quiet places, under the shade of overhanging trees, was he seen apart from his playfellows, stooping his sunburnt brow over the Scripture page, gleams of light passing to and fro over the half ragged form and the thin eager face, as he stooped and read. So, day by day, a gentle thoughtfulness grew over features that to a stranger's eye at first might seem rude and wild. Nobleness of love had been kindled in the poor boy's heart. Touching the fountains of all truth and love in Christ, there breathed into him, from his simple Bible, thoughts to which he could not give a name, but that filled him with a quiet and lowly happiness, wrought softness into his voice and step, raised the wonder of his parents often, as he clothed them in words they had never heard from child's lips before, and, when he was alone in deep retreats among the hills and glens, taught him how to pray. God's Word was his hourly friend—he talked to its pages—it shone on him with a face of love—it exchanged its holy thoughts with his—it was placed beneath his pillow when he slept—it was treasured in a little pocket near his heart when he went out to his daily toil—it seemed to whisper its verses to him wherever he turned his step—when he opened its boards to read, it was to him like opening the door of a temple, into which, entering, he met Jesus in still communion—and in his heart the Bible was so dear, that all its glorious secrets seemed hidden there, in that little beating world, for ever. So the grace of God's Word became the life of his life.

Time went on, and the little scholar grew up towards manhood. His parents had meanwhile died, and, alone, he was forced to go out to seek his fortunes in the world. By