

For the Colonial Churchman.

PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS.  
No. 2.

THE SICK ROOM.

A few days after the conversation related in my last, I called at the house of Mr. C. according to promise. He was at home, and Mrs. C. still continued very ill. Having taken care of my horse, he showed me into the room which was occupied by his suffering wife.

'Take a seat Parson,' said he, handing me at the same time a chair.

I complied, and found myself close by the bed on which the sick person was stretched. She seemed to be suffering very severely from a sort of intermittent fever, accompanied by cough and great restlessness—evidently the effects of much care and mental anxiety. Her case had all the appearance of an advanced consumption. Being made aware of my presence, she accosted me in these words:—

'Sir: I am glad to see you. I have been wishing to have some talk with you for some time.' 'As soon as I heard, from your husband, of your being resolved to visit you, and do every thing in my power to alleviate your mental suffering.'

'It is indeed suffering. Oh! what have I not suffered! I have been very wicked: I know I have—this sickness continues long—Oh! the power of death distracts me.'

'It gives me great satisfaction Mrs. C. to perceive that you are sensible of your condition. All mankind, you know, are sinners—great sinners. The Scripture tells us, that 'there is no one that liveth without sinning.' But the first step to repentance is a strong conviction of the truth.'

'And do you think,' she eagerly inquired, 'that I have yet time for repentance?'

'No doubt of it. A death-bed repentance ought not to be trusted to: far less ought we to put off the time of preparation for eternity until the pains of sickness force it upon our attention.—A late repentance is better than none.'

'Oh! Sir, I am rejoiced to hear you say that.'

'Our Saviour's address to the thief on the cross, who was his fellow-sufferer, is a proof of the efficacy of sincere, though late, penitence. 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Still, as I said before, it ought if possible to be avoided by an early attention to the ways of godliness.'

'And how can I know that I have repented?'

'In your case, your own heart must inform you of the real state of your soul. Repentance must always begin in the heart. If you feel abhorrence at your past sins; if you have a fervent desire to flee to the Redeemer for help and succour; if you seem to yourself to be sinking under the burden of your sins, and ardently wish to obtain forgiveness, and be reconciled to a just and a holy God; if the present state of your mind answers in any way to the description, then I have no hesitation in saying

that the elements—the beginnings of repentance—are already manifested in your heart.'

'Oh! Sir, I feel all this and a great deal more. I feel more than I can tell you—afraid of what I have been doing all my life long,—afraid of death. This distracts me. Are you sure that the Saviour will receive me?'

'Certainly He will. We have his own word for it—'Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' 'Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.' 'I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord.' 'Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?' These and similar expressions which are to be found in almost every page of Scripture shew us, that Jesus Christ is ready and willing to receive all that turn unto Him. The arms of his mercy are stretched out still; He not only professes his willingness to receive with his favour the truly penitent sinner; but urges him, in the most affectionate language, to embrace the terms of his mercy,—to receive his salvation,—and to save his own soul alive.'

'Oh! how ungrateful I have been, to neglect so good and so merciful a Saviour! Oh! that I could be young again, and allowed to live over my life!—It should have been very different—it should indeed.'

'But you know the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,—a broken and a contrite heart He will not despise. If it is His pleasure that you should get well again, you shall have an opportunity of displaying in your conduct and actions the influence of Divine grace: should he determine otherwise, the door of mercy is still open. There is still a way to escape despair.'

'Tell me how—do.'

'The Apostle writes to the Ephesians, and tells them—'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' The best works that we can do, have no saving merit in themselves: after we have done all we are unprofitable servants. If therefore your faith is strong in the Lord,—if you rest upon His merits alone as the plea of your pardon, and are fully convinced that there is none other name given under heaven through whom you may receive health and salvation, but only the name of Jesus Christ and Him crucified: with these feelings and sentiments, I see no reason why you should be afraid to cast all your care upon God, because he careth for you, and leave your care entirely in His hands.'

Mrs. C. only answered me by a look in which gratitude for mercies received, and resignation to the Divine will, were strongly marked. The effort which was necessary to keep the attention fixed on what we were talking about, had nearly exhausted her. So, I inquired whether she would join with me in prayer? She assented: and I went through our inimitable service for the visitation of the sick, adapting it as nearly as I could to the particular ease of the sufferer. She seemed to join with great

fervency in the prayers, and when I concluded remarked:—

'What a fine Psalm that is you read.' 'In thee O Lord do I put my trust.' 'I hope that my trust is in Him!'

After exhorting her to pray often at the throne of grace, that her present state of mind might be strengthened and fortified,—that whether dying or living she might have a personal interest in the great sacrifice offered on the cross,—I took my leave promising to repeat my visit.

Mr. C. followed me out of the house, and thanked me for my attention. When we were outside I asked him whether he had done what I recommended him at our parting the other day.

'Why not altogether, Sir, I am sorry to say. I read my bible some few; but I could not pray.'

'At all events you have made a beginning?'

'I don't know as I have. The bible you see, Sir, is such a very large book. It takes so much time to read it through.'

'It certainly does take time and attention both, to read it through: but do not you think that the object to be attained by doing so, is worth all the trouble and attention you can bestow upon it?'

'It is very possible, it may Sir.'

'There is not the least doubt of it. You remember my telling, and explaining to you the other day, that the soul lives after death?'

'Yes: I do; and how you said somethin' about reason, and managing a horse.'

'Very well. If the soul is to live after death,—your soul, that enables you to think for yourself—would you not like to know what becomes of it.—It does not remain in the body: for that after the breath leaves it, is a mere clod of the valley,—without sensation,—without feeling. What then becomes of the soul?'

'Well: I never troubled my head about that: but now that you mention it, I certainly should like to know somethin' about it.'

'The only book, that gives us information concerning this most important subject, is the Bible.—It tells us that the souls of wicked men shall be miserable forever; but that those of good men shall experience, in a future world, a degree of pleasure and happiness, of which we cannot at present form any adequate conception.'

'It is all very true, I've no doubt Sir: but we as has got no larning cannot understand such things.'

'Why not? By your own confession you have never made the experiment: so that you cannot be a fit judge. There is nothing, believe me, in the whole Bible, but what any person of common apprehension may easily understand. Just try it. Read several chapters in the beginning of either the Old or New Testament, and you will find nothing but what you can easily make out.'

'The first leisure time I have I'll certainly try.'

'But why not at once? Delay may be the cause of your not doing it at all. For consider how anxious you would naturally feel with regard to any new