

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## A STORY OF TWENTY YEARS AGO.

Mr. B. was a great merchant in Baltimore. One morn- ing he was passing over the vessels that lay at the wharf; he stepped upon the deck of one, at the stern of which he saw a negro, whose dejected countenance gave sure indica- tion of distress. He accosted him with:

"Hey! my man what is the matter?"

The negro lifted up his eyes and looking at Mr. B. replied:

"Ah! massa, I'm in great trouble."

"What about?"

"Kase I've foltch'd up here to be sold."

"What for? What have you been doing? Have you been stealing? or did you run away? or what?"

"No, no massa; none o' dat. Its becase I didn't mind de audas."

"What kind of orders?"

"Well, massa stranger, I will tell you. Massa Willum werry strict man, and a werry nice man, too, and everybody on de place got to mind him, and I brake frow de rule, but I didn't tend to brake de rule, doe; I forgot myself and I got too high."

"It is for getting drunk, then, is it?"

"Oh, no, sah; not dat nother."

"Then tell me what you are to be sold for."

"For praying, sah."

"For praying! That's a strange tale. Will not your master permit you to pray?"

"Oh, yes, sah, he lets me pray easy; but I hollers too loud."

"And why do you halloo in your prayers?"

"Kase de spirit comes on me and I gets happy fore I knows it; den I gone, kan't trole myself; den I knows nut- ting 'bout massa's rule."

"And do you suppose your master will really sell you for that?"

"Oh, yes; no help for me now. All de mien in de world couldn't help me now—Kase when Massa Willum says one thing he no do anoder."

"What is your name?"

"Moses."

"What is your master's name?"

"Massa's name is Colonel Wm. C—."

"Where does he live?"

"Down on de Eastin Shoah."

"Is he a good master and does he treat you well?"

"Oh, yes; no better in de wuld."

"Stand up and let me look at you."

And Moses stood up and presented a robust frame; and as Mr. B. stripped up his sleeve, his arm gave evidence of un- usual muscular strength.

"Where is your master?"

"Yander he is, jes comin' to de warf."

As Mr. B. started for the shore he heard Moses give a heavy sigh, followed by a deep groan. Moses was not at all pleased with the present phase of affairs. He was strongly impressed with the idea that Mr. B. was a trader and in- tended to buy him, and it was this that made him so un- willing to communicate to Mr. B. the desired information. Mr. B. reached the wharf just as Colonel C. did. He in- troduced himself and said:

"I understand that you want to sell that negro man yon- der, on board the schooner."

Colonel C. replied that he did.

"What do you ask for him?"

"I expect to get seven hundred dollars."

"How old do you reckon him to be?"

"Somewhere about thirty."

"Is he healthy?"

"Very; he never had any sickness in his life except one or two spells of the ague."

"Is he hearty?"

"Yes, sir; he will eat as much as any man ought, and it will do him as much good."

"Is he a good hand?"

"Yes, sir; he is the best hand on my place. He is steady, honest and industrious. He has been my foreman for the last ten years, and a more trusty negro I never knew."

"Why do you wish to sell him?"

"Because he disobeys my orders. As I said, he is my foreman; and that he might be available at any moment I might want him, I built his hut within about a hundred yards of my own house, and I have never rung the bell at any time of the night or morning that the horn did not answer in five minutes after. But two years ago he got re- ligion and commenced with what he terms family prayer—that is, praying in his hut every night and morning, and when he began his prayer it was impossible to tell when he would stop, especially if (as he termed it) he got happy. Then he would sing and pray and halloo for an hour or two together, and you might hear him nearly a mile off. And he would pray for me and my wife and my children, and our whole family connections to the third generation, and some- times, when we would have visitors, Moses' prayers would interrupt the conversation and destroy the enjoyment of the whole company. The women would cry and the children would cry, and it would get me almost frantic, and even after I had retired, it would sometimes be almost daylight before I could go to sleep, for it appeared to me that I could hear Moses pray for three hours after he had finished. I bore it as long as I could, and then forbid his praying any more—and Moses promised obedience, but he soon trans- gressed, and my rule is never to whip, but whenever a negro becomes incorrigible, I sell him. This keeps them in better subjection, and is less trouble than whipping. And I par- doned Moses twice for disobedience in praying so loud, but the third time I knew I must sell him, or every negro on the place would soon be perfectly regardless of all my orders."

"You spoke of Moses' hut. I suppose from that he has a family?"

"Yes he has a woman and three children, or wife, I sup-

pose he calls her now—for soon after he got religion he asked me if they might be married, and I presume they were."

"What will you take for her and the children?"

"If you want them for your own use, I will take seven hundred dollars; but I shall not sell Moses or them to go out of the State."

"I wish them all for my own use and will give you the four- teen hundred dollars."

Mr. B. and Colonel C. then went to Mr. B.'s store, drew up the writings and closed the sale, after which they returned to the vessel; and Mr. B. approached the negro, who sat with his eyes fixed upon the deck, wrapped in meditation of the most awful forebodings, and said:

"Well, Moses, I have bought you."

Moses made a low bow, and every muscle in his face worked with emotion as he replied:

"Is you, Massa? Where is I gwine, massa? Is I gwine to Georgia?"

"No," said Mr. B., "I am a merchant here in this city. Yonder is my store, and I want you to attend on the store, and I have purchased your wife and children too, that you may not be separated."

"Bress God for dat; and, massa, kin I go to meetin' sometimes?"

"Yes, Moses, you can go to church three times on Sab- bath and every night in the week, and you can pray as often as you choose, and as loud you choose; and every time you pray, I want you to pray for me, my wife and all my child- ren; for if you are a good man, your prayers will do us no harm, and we need them very much; and if you wish to, you can pray for everybody of my name in the State it will not injure them."

While Mr. B. was dealing out these privileges to Moses, the negro's eyes danced in their sockets, and his full heart laughed outright for gladness, exposing two rows of as even, clean ivory as any African can boast; and his heart's re- sponse was, "bress God, bress God all de time, and bress you, too, massa; Moses neber tink 'bout he gwine hab all dese commodationers; dis make me tink 'bout Joseph in de Egypt." And after Moses had poured a few blessings on Colonel C. and bidden him a warm adieu, and requested him to give his love and farewell to his mistress, the child- ren and all the servants, he followed Mr. B. to the store, to enter upon the functions of his new office.

The return of the schooner brought to Moses his wife and children.

Early the next spring, as Mr. B. was one day standing at the store door, he saw a man leap upon the wharf from the deck of a vessel, and walk hurriedly towards the store. He soon recognized him as Colonel C. They exchanged sala- tations, and to the Colonel's inquiry after Moses, Mr. B. re- plied that he was upstairs measuring grain, and invited him to walk up and see him. Soon Mr. B.'s attention was ar- rested by a very confused noise above. He listened and heard an unusual shuffling of feet, some one sobbing violently and some one talking very hurriedly; and when he reflected on Colonel C.'s movements and the peculiar expression of his countenance, he became alarmed and went up to see what was transpiring.

When he reached the head of the stairs he was startled at seeing Moses in the middle of the floor down upon one knee, with his arm around the Colonel's waist, and talking most rapidly, while the Colonel stood weeping audibly. So soon as the Colonel could sufficiently control his feelings, he told Mr. B. that he had never been able to free himself from the influence of Moses' prayers and that during the past year he and his wife and children had been converted to God.

Moses responded: "Bress God, Massa C., doe I way up hea, I neber forget you in my prayers; I olles put de old massa side de new one. Bress God, dis make Moses tink about Joseph in de Egypt again."

The Colonel then stated to Mr. B. that his object in com- ing to Baltimore was to buy Moses and his family back again. But Mr. B. assured him that was out of the ques- tion, for he could not part with him; and he intended to manumit Moses and his wife at forty, and his children at thirty-three years of age.

Moses was not far wrong in his reference to Joseph. For when Joseph was sold into Egypt God overruled it to his good, and he obtained blessings that were far beyond his expectations; so with Moses, he eventually proved the in- strument in God's hands of saving the man's soul who sold him.

Old Moses is still living, and at present occupies a com- fortable house of his own, and is doing well for both worlds.

## ROBERT DICK.

## "POET, ARTIST, PHILOSOPHER, AND HERO."

The most northern county of Scotland is Caithness, a wild region of mountains, marsh, and rock-ribbed headlands, in which the storms of the Atlantic have worn every variety of fantastic indentation. Much of the land has been reclaimed in modern days by rich proprietors. There are manufac- tures of linen, wool, rope, and straw, besides important fisheries; so that forty thousand people find habitation and subsistence in the county. There are castles, too, ancient and modern; some in ruins; some of yesterday, the summer home of wealthy people from the south.

The coast is among the most picturesque in the world. Thurso is the most northern town of this most northern county. It is situated on Thurso bay which affords a good harbour, and it has thus grown to be a place of three or four thousand inhabitants. From this town the Orkney Islands can be seen, and a good walker can reach in a day's tramp Dunnet Head, the lofty promontory which ends the Island.

Here lived, laboured, studied, and died Robert Dick, baker, a man whose name should never be pronounced by intelligent men but with veneration.

He did not look like a hero. When the boys of the town saw him coming out of his baker's shop, in a tall, store-pipe hat, an old-fashioned dress-coat, and jean trousers, they used to follow him to the shore, and watch him as he walked along it with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Suddenly he

would stop, fall upon his hands and knees, crawl slowly on- ward, and then with one hand catch something in the sand; an insect, perhaps. He would stick it upon a pin, put it in his hat, and go on his way; and the boys would whisper to one another, that there was a mad baker in Thurso. Once he picked up a nut upon the beach, and said to his compan- ion:

"That has been brought by the ocean current and the prevailing winds, all the way from one of the West India Islands."

He made the most astonishing journeys about that far-end of the universe in the pursuit of knowledge. We read of his walking thirty-two miles in a soaking rain to the top of a mountain, and bringing home only a plant of white heather. On another day he walked thirty-six miles to find a peculiar kind of fern. Again, he walked for twenty-four hours in hail, rain, and wind, reaching home at three o'clock in the morning. But at seven he was up and ready for work as usual. He carried heavy loads, too, when he went searching for minerals and fossils. In one of his letters we read:

"Shouldering an old poker, a four-pound hammer, and with two chisels in my pocket, I set out. . . . What ham- mering—what sweating! Coat off; got my hands cut to bleeding."

In another letter he speaks of having "three pounds of iron chisels in his trousers' pocket, a four-pound hammer in one hand, and a fourteen-pound sledge-hammer in the other, and his old beaver hat filled with paper and twine."

But who and what was this man, and why was he per- forming these laborious journeys? Robert Dick, born in 1811, was the son of an excise officer, who gave his children a hard step-mother when Robert was ten years old. The boy's own mother, all tenderness and affection, had spoiled him for such a life as he now had to lead under a woman who loved him not, and did not understand his unusual cast of character, his love of nature, his wandering by the sea, his coming home with his pockets full of wet shells and his trousers damaged by the mire. She snubbed him; she whipped him. He bore her ill-treatment with wonderful patience; but it impaired the social side of him forever. Nearly fifty years after he said to one of his few friends:

"All my naturally buoyant, youthful spirits were broken. To this day I feel the effects. I cannot shake them off. It is this that still makes me shrink from the world."

At thirteen he escaped from a home blighted by this wo- man, and went apprentice to a baker; and when he was out of his time served as a journeyman for three years; then set up a small business for himself in Thurso. It was a very small business indeed; for at that day bread was a luxury which many people of Caithness only allowed themselves on Sun- days, their usual fare being oatmeal. He was a baker all the days of his life, and his business never increased so as to oblige him to employ even a baker's boy. He made his bread, his biscuit, and his gingerbread, without any assistance, and when it was done, it was sold in his little shop by an old housekeeper, who lived with him till he died.

The usual course of his day was this: He was up in the morning very early, at any time from three to six, according to his plans for the after part of the day. He kneaded his bread, worked the dough into loaves, put the whole into the oven, waited till it was baked, and drew it out. His work was then usually done for the day. The old housekeeper sold it as it was called for, and, in case her master did not get home in time, she could set the sponge in the evening. Usually he could get away from the bakehouse soon after the middle of the day, and he had then all the afternoon, the evening, and the night for studying nature in Caithness. His profits were small, but his wants were few, and, during the greater part of his life, he was able to spare a small sum per annum for the purchase of books.

If this man had enjoyed the opportunities he would have had but for his mother's death, he might have been one of the greatest naturalists that ever lived. Nature had given him every requisite—a frame of iron, Scotch endurance, a poet's enthusiasm, the instinct of not believing anything in science till he was sure of it, till he had put it to the test of repeated observation and experiment. Although a great reader, he derived most of his knowledge directly from na- ture's self. He began by merely picking up shells, as a child picks them up, because they were pretty; until, while still a man, he had a very complete collection, all nicely arranged in a cabinet, and labelled. Youth being past, the shy and lonely young man began to study botany, which he pursued until he had seen and felt everything that grew in Caithness. Next he studied insects, and studied with such zeal, that in nine months he had collected, of beetles alone, two hundred and fifty-six specimens. There are still in the Thurso museum, two hundred and twenty varieties of bees, and two hundred and forty kinds of butterflies collected by him.

Early in life, he was powerfully attracted to astronomy, and read everything he could find upon the subject. But he was one of those students whom books alone can never satisfy; and, as a telescope was very far beyond his means, he was obliged to devote himself to subjects more within his reach. He contrived out of his small savings to buy a good microscope, and found it indispensable. Geology was the subject which occupied him longest and absorbed him most. He pursued it with untiring and intelligent devotion for thirty years. He found the books full of mistakes, because, as he said, so many geologists study nature from a gig, and are afraid to get a little mud on their trousers.

"When," said he, "I want to know what a rock is, I go to it. I hammer it; I dissect it. I then know what it really is. The science of geology! No, no; we must just work patiently on, collect facts, and in course of time geology may der 'sp into a science."

I suppose there never was a man whose love of knowledge was more disinterested. He used to send curious specimens to Hugh Miller, editor of *The Witness*, as well as a geo- logist, and Mr. Miller would acknowledge the gifts in his paper. But Robert Dick entreated him not to do so.

"I am a quiet creature," he wrote, "and do not like to see myself in print at all. So leave it to be understood who found the old bones, and let them guess who can."

As long as he was in unimpaired health, he continued this