

PARISH PERSONAGES.*

OUR BEADLE AND HIS FRIENDS.

BY ERASMUS OLDSTYLE, ESQUIRE.

CHAPTER XII.

ALLHALLOWS Parsonage was a quaint and ancient structure, and its antique peculiarities were the more conspicuous by reason of the modern buildings in which it appeared to be imbedded. The space which had been originally assigned for the house and offices, was at no period very considerable; but the allotment which had been intended by the founder for a garden, having become perfectly useless in consequence of the circle of houses by which it was surrounded, a former Rector had caused buildings to be erected on the land, and very judiciously applied the rentals towards the endowment of a chapel in a remote part of the Parish.

The house when viewed from the front, appeared much smaller than it really was; in form it seemed to be oblong, but in fact it was constructed after the model which may be illustrated by the letter T; the shaft, which jutted into the rear, being designed for the accommodation of the servants, having become an apartment sufficiently airy and spacious to dine thirty or forty poor people. There was also a dormitory above, divided into compartments capable of affording accommodation for ten beds; nor can there be any doubt but that at an earlier period in the history of the Parish, the virtues of charity and hospitality were dispensed in conformity with the old English interpretation of those graces.

Nor could blame be imputed to the Rev. Mr. Austin, that the primitive practice of his predecessors had grown into desuetude. The spring which had supplied the means, had been destroyed. A race of sturdy beggars had succeeded to the class of unfortunate poor. The property of the poor had been pilfered by kings and courtiers, and the people were taxed to support the mendicants who had been created by the insatiable lust of a monarch, and the unscrupulous avarice of a court. The blow, however, which was dealt at the church, fell upon the land, for those who had been the grateful pensioners of the clergy became the turbulent paupers of the state.

The Rectory had rather a dismal and forbidding appearance, for though it was built of red brick, and embellished with encaustic work of flint and oyster shells, still the rooms were low, and the windows, which were latticed, were of small dimensions. The neighbours who dwelt in the prim and priggish looking buildings in the vicinity, looked upon the old parsonage with aversion, and wondered how the good Rector could live in such an "orrid old place, with such windows," especially when they were aware that a sum of money had been subscribed by the Parishioners, but declined by the Rector, for the express purpose of rough-casting the house, and of substituting other sashes for the antique window frames with which the building was supplied.

For forty years had the Reverend Mr. Austin resided in this house. A few days only had elapsed after his arrival, when, upon the birth of his daughter, the young wife upon whom he doated was removed from him by death. The first funeral which he attended in the church-yard of his Parish, was when he followed to the grave the mortal remains of her who was his wife—the mother of his child. Poor man! his path of life was early overcast. Ten short months had scarce fulfilled their circuit, since he, a joyous bridegroom, had led her to the altar, whom he now deposited in the tomb. Sable trappings and dismal vestments had fast succeeded to the bridal array, and the pathway, strewn with flowers, the merry peal of village music, had been fast followed by the measured toll of the funeral bell; and the earth, as it fell with hollow echo upon her confined dust, seemed to mock the prayers and blessings which had so lately been performed to crown her wedded happiness.

No mortal tongue can tell the days of anguish through which the Rector bore his heavy load of life. No human eye was witness to his sufferings, for his sorrows were too precious to expose to the curious gaze of man. No doubt he wept, but his tears fell in secret. No doubt he sighed, but it was in the loneliness of his chamber. In appearance he became altered, and in manner too, he