

Reminiscences of a Scottish Country Parish.

BY AN OCTAGENARIAN.

VIII. STATE OF THE PULPIT AND MINISTRY.—(Continued).

For the Review

Not only were the sermons of many of the ministers in this district limited in number and given generally in the same order of rotation, but the subjects chosen were not always of such a character as to lead their hearers to repentance and faith. In many cases they were moral essays without any heads or divisions and with no very close or pointed application.

In a volume of sermons of Dr. Chalmers's published after his death specimens may be seen of the kind of sermons common in his early days—Sermons in which neither the name of God nor of Christ is to be found from beginning to end. We once heard of a sermon preached in a neighboring parish by the parish minister of the time which came up again and again in its regular rotation and which was known in the parish as the "worm sermon," where the preacher attempted to show that worms were happier creatures than men or angels, inasmuch as they had neither care nor sorrow.

The library of the same minister consisted of a Bible, a Concordance and an Almanac. "He is not much of a preacher," his parishioners would say, "but he is a grand farmer." His stock of sermons was so limited that certain observant ones could tell beforehand where the text for the day would be found; and a man who had a head for figures knowing the average amount of yearly stipend, the number of sermons the minister had, and the number of times they had been repeated in his memory, could tell the money value each sermon had been to the preacher.

One thing could be said of the sermons of the ministers of that day, they were at least original. The copying or buying of printed sermons was, so far as we have ever heard, never laid to their charge. It remained for the English clergy and for times nearer to our own day to discover and encourage such a practice.

The practice of borrowing a sermon now and again from a neighbor was not altogether unknown. In a volume of reminiscences by the late Dr. Davidson, of Inverurie, an amusing example is given of a borrowed sermon, and as the place where it occurred was near to our home we have often heard it told. There was a vacancy in the parish and the pulpit was being supplied by probationers for a time, till a presentation could be issued by the patron. According to custom

one of the neighboring ministers was appointed to take charge of the supply during the vacancy. The same was a good deal of a wag and fond of a practical joke. As his manse lay in the way he arranged that the preachers should visit him for their instructions and stay with him over the Saturday night. It happened that one of the first who came to supply the vacant pulpit had unfortunately forgotten his manuscript. He was bewailing his misfortune and wondering what he would do in the circumstance. "Give yourself no trouble about the matter," said his host; "I will lend you one of mine. I preached it lately to my own people. It was thought a good sermon and will be quite suitable." The preacher was pleased to accept the offer, and so next day he preached to the parishioners of Woodney from the text, "Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents." On the following Sabbath the next preacher, on some pretext or another, was prevailed upon to take the same sermon and deliver it in the same place to the same people. What they thought or what they said, we do not know, but doubtless they thought it a strange coincidence that the two men should happen to choose the same text and subject. But their astonishment was increased when by some means or other the third preacher came the next Sabbath with "Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents." One man, the village blacksmith, could stand it no longer, but when he heard that Jacob had come back to them again, rose from his seat and walked out of the church, muttering in wrathful words, heard by all, "Deil care whar he dwalt; he has dwalt long enough in Woodney."

But a great change took place and a new race of ministers began to take the room of the old men. Changes too were taking place all over the land. In 1834 the Evangelical party gained the ascendancy in the General Assembly and reforming measures began to be introduced. Patronage, though not abolished, was modified, so that an unacceptable presentee could not be intruded upon an unwilling congregation. The Session, for a long time a self-elective body or the nominees of the minister, began to be elected by the free choice of communicants, missions to the Jews and to the Gentiles inaugurated, church extension promoted on a large scale, and the *quoad sacra* ministers raised to seats in the church court. New life was imparted and for the next ten years, the Church of Scotland enjoyed a season of general prosperity such as had not been enjoyed by her since the time of the Second Reformation.

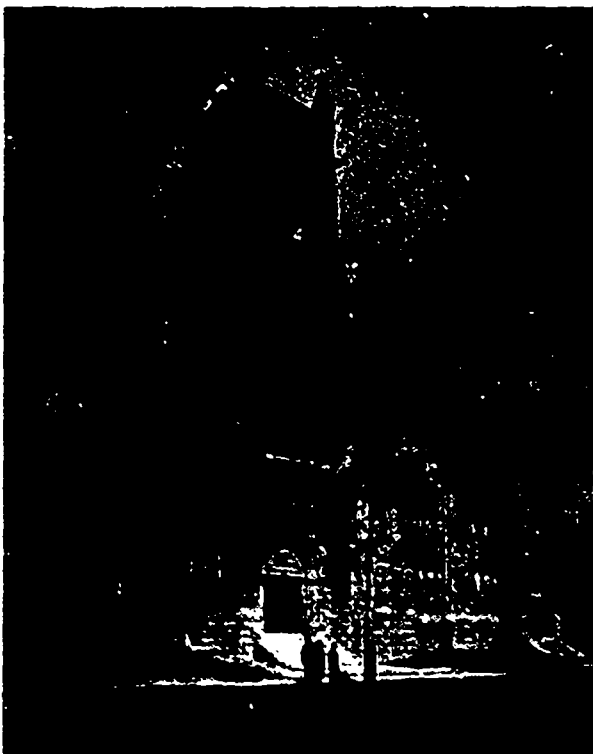
The Ownership of Life.

Acts xviii. 23.

T. IVERTON.

For the Review.

The little birds upon the boughs, according to Omar Khayam, sing two eternal notes of "I and thou." We do not truly live until we have said these words in the sense in which the Apostle would use them. The agnostic who denies that God can be known cannot use them at all. He does not know whence his life came, nor whither it tends. The atheist would scorn the use of them: for he denies that there is a God whom the soul can thus address. He may acknowledge that his life is not his own since it may be taken from him at any moment, but he will not admit that God owns him or has any interest in him. One says "I do not know whose I am"; the other, "I am nobody's." Practical atheism, a very common heresy, says, "my life is my own." It matters not who gave me life, or how soon it may be taken from me. For the present it is mine, and I am going to enjoy it as I please. There are thousands of nominal Christians whose lives and conduct prove that this is their creed. This is to miss the real end of life and to take all purpose and order out of it. To such life is but "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing." The Christian view of life is different. Paul says: "Whose I am." He has been taken out of the shallows in a large place, and we must feel that he has the right view and the right hold of life. He is not isolated—not alone—not an orphan. He is God's. He knows that he belongs to Christ; for long ago he



ERSKINE CHURCH, MONTREAL.