

Reminiscences of a Scottish Country Parish.

BY AN OCTOGENARIAN.

X.—STATE OF RELIGION AND MORALS.—(Continued.)

For the Review.

As to religious knowledge, the Presbyterian people in the Parish were generally fairly well instructed in the Shorter and Mother's Catechisms and in the histories of the Old and New Testaments. We had our knowledge in that matter from our frequent appearances, along with the people of the district where we resided, at the periodic diets of catechising, when old and young had in their turn to stand up and be examined on their knowledge of divine things. At such times the parishioners answered fairly well the questions put to them, although much ignorance did sometimes appear on the part of some, and our young minister was not the kindest or most patient of examiners.

These diets of catechising, or "examins" as they were called, were great institutions and many traditions of the strange answers given on such occasions were among the memorabilia of each minister's incumbency. Nothing very remarkable took place in our experience; but we remember hearing of a rather amusing example of an answer by an elderly female who generally became somewhat mixed in her answers to the questions in the Shorter Catechism, and who used, if possible, to slip out when the minister's back was turned. The place of meeting was a farmer's barn, where there was no window, the only light at any time coming in at the open door. Janet had humbly taken her seat on the doorstep, purposing to make her escape as early as possible. Her habit was known to the minister, and, so, turning to her, he asked, What is a sacrament? Somewhat confused and doubtless taken aback by the unexpected turn of affairs, she said: A Sacrament, sir, is a means of grace, justification, adoption, and sanctification, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, doth rest in his grave till the resurrection.

Up to 1836 there was no Sabbath school in our parish, but one had been opened in the neighboring parish about a year before, to which we were sent. It met in a very primitive school house and was conducted by three of the neighboring farmers. They were plain unlettered men, but men whose hearts had been touched by divine grace, and who were anxious to do what they could for the spiritual benefit of the young in their vicinity, and whose prayers and teaching remain as a blessed memory with us still. As soon as a Sabbath school was opened in our own church we began to attend and continued to do so until we entered College.

When the Sabbath School was started in the Parish Church it happened that there were two probationers residing in the parish as tutors in gentlemen's families, and they at once gave their assistance, the one taking the class of the bigger boys and the other the girls. The classes met in the church in the square or table seats, which were found very convenient for teaching. Of course the Shorter Catechism was taught, but in addition there was introduced a series of Catechisms prepared in Edinburgh by Lyall and Inglis, which proved very helpful to a better understanding of Divine truth.

As regards the general morals of the Parish, while as a whole the people might be said to be a moral people, crime being almost unknown, there were things in which the condition of affairs here as in the whole surrounding district was far from satisfactory. Breaches of the Seventh Commandment were far too common and while the church took diligent cognizance of the offenders, the sin had become so common that it ceased to be a disgrace to those who were guilty of it. There was much in the habits of the time, such as the mingling of the sexes in the work of the farm, especially of the harvest field, which tended to a lax morality. Nor was the sin confined to the class of farm servants but included the families of the outwardly respectable and well-to-do farmers.

Total abstinence and the temperance movement had not been heard of at the time at which we are writing.

There was, it must be acknowledged, a good deal of drinking then, but not much habitual drunkenness. The practice of treating was universal. The bottle was on the table at all times for the entertainment of neighbors or visitors who might call, and the tumbler of toddy after dinner was considered part of the dinner itself. It is well known that the clergy were not far from the imputation of indulging sometimes. We remember in one of the trials before a certain Presbytery of a minister accused of drunkenness, when the question was asked at one of the witnesses, known as one of his boon companions, "Did you ever see the minister drunk?" "Me see him drunk! Na, na, long or he's half slaket, I am blin' fu'."

Crimes were rare and lawsuits unknown. Differences did occasionally arise between friends and neighbors; but they were exhorted to make up thier differences and they generally did so before the next Communion.

Altogether on looking back over the state of Religion and Morals in the Parish sixty or seventy years ago, while there were certain things that were not as they should be, the people were a decent church-going and industrious race, minding their own business and up to their light striving to do their duty to their Maker and to their followmen.

Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

BY REV. GEORGE SEXTON, M.A., LL.D.

For the Review.

II.

Having reached home with his mysterious burden the prophet proceeded very naturally to inspect the plates, when he discovered that the mysterious hieroglyphics inscribed thereon were quite beyond his power to decipher. The language was Egyptian, and as has been stated Smith's education was of a very limited character, and he could hardly be expected to be able to read and translate a tongue with which only a few scholars were acquainted. This threatened to become an insurmountable difficulty, but it was soon overcome. There had been found with the plates a curious instrument called the Urim and Thummim—of which more will be told later on—which consisted of "two transparent stones, clear as crystal, set in two rims of a bow," and this supplied what was lacking in education. On looking through this instrument, Egyptian became as plain and simple as English, so by this means the prophet was enabled to read and translate the records. A language unknown to him, or for that matter to any one else, could be easily understood by the aid of these magic eye-glasses. It seems a pity that a magic pen was not provided also, so as to render unnecessary the employment, of what in this case must have been very objectionable, an amanuensis. Whether Smith could write or not I am unable to say, certain it is that he did not; but sitting behind a curtain, out of sight of the scribe he pretended to translate from the plates, whilst the amanuensis on the other side of the screen took down his words. And this we are told was the origin of the book of Mormon—with how much truth we shall see hereafter—first published in 1830.

It is difficult to imagine a sillier or more improbable tale than this cock-and-bull story of the origin of the pretended new Revelation. The improbabilities in it—to say nothing of the palpable contradictions—are so great that one wonders how any man in his sober senses could have ever received it in any other spirit than that of laughter and ridicule. For, upon what evidence are we asked to believe that those plates had any existence outside the imagination of the concoctor of the puerile story? Naturally one would enquire regarding their present locality. Are they open to inspection to-day in any part of the habitable globe? Alas! No, they are to be found nowhere on the face of the earth. They have completely vanished from among men and to seek for them would be about as successful a task as the search for the famous Lamp of Aladdin or the invisible coat worn by a celebrated hero of the nursery. No one ever saw these plates but Joseph Smith, and the entire incredible story there-