

HISTORY
OF
HARDY, THE SOLDIER

SHEWING
HOW HE LEFT THE PLOUGH TO ENLIST
IN THE ARMY;

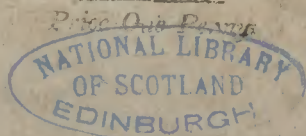
*And after being engaged in many Battles abroad, returned to end
his days in the Cottage in which he was Born.*



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HISTORY

OF

HARDY, the SOLDIER.

RELIGION makes me happy every where," said the old soldier, Hardy, as he rested his weary limbs on a mossy bank beside the road, and stooped down to quench his thirst from a purling stream which flowed at his feet. "Many a time," added he, talking to himself, "have I drunk from this brook in years which are passed, while I was watching my sheep, or as I came home thirsty from harvest. Sweet is the memory of joys that are fled, especially the recollection of youthful delights after scenes of such toil and distress as I have witnessed. Over burning sands and icy plains, trackless wastes and tempestuous seas have I passed. Many a time have I attacked the daring foe, stormed his fortified entrenchments, braved the cannon's roar, and marched to victory over the dead bodies of my comrades. Often have I been wounded, and yet what a mercy that I am still alive, and that I am permitted once more to approach my native village in health! What shall I render unto the Lord for all his goodness?" Saying this, the veteran warrior, kneeling, poured out his prayer to God, and his tears of gratitude and joy, flowing down the furrows which time had ploughed in his cheeks, were lost in the streams of the bubbling rivulet.

Edward and Amelia, the two beloved children of Mr. Benson, had been sitting and reading in a little bower which they had built, just behind the bank on which the aged soldier was seated. When they first saw him approaching, they laid aside their books, to indulge that acquisitive curiosity which is so natural to the young, by noticing the conduct of this hoary traveller. After the old soldier had concluded his devotions, leaning on his staff, he arose, and pursued his journey with trembling steps. Edward and his sister, on seeing this, immediately ran down the lawn, and opening the garden-gate, went out into the road and met Hardy, who pulled off his hat and bowed; as the young gentleman and lady approached him.

Edward went up to the old soldier, while his sister waited a little behind, and looking him in the face, with affectionate sympathy he said, "Poor old man! you seem to be very feeble and aged." "Few and evil have the days of my pilgrimage been," replied Hardy; "but I hope at last to end them in the place which gave me birth, for I can now see the little cottage in which I was born, upon the hill yonder,

amidst the cluster of trees." "That cottage is my father's," said Edward, "and I will ask him to give it to you." "Thank you, my dear young gentleman; but, perhaps, your father knows nothing of poor Hardy; though forty or fifty years ago I worked for the 'squire who occupied the house in which you live; but there are so many changes in this uncertain world that I suppose it is possessed by some other family now." "What was that gentleman's name?" inquired Edward, with his characteristic warmth and eagerness. "His name will never be forgotten by me, it was 'squire Benson." "My grandfather," exclaimed Edward; "did you really work for him?" "Yes," replied Hardy; "and now I look at your face, I see that you are the very image of the good old gentleman. How is your dear father? I often nursed him when a baby, and played with him when a child: he was always very fond of Hardy, and I loved him exceedingly." When the old soldier had said this, Edward took hold of one hand, and Amelia of the other, while both of them cried out, "You must come to papa, he will be so glad to see you!" Saying this, they dragged him along with them to the gate.

Mr. Benson happening to see his children leading a poor old soldier up the gravel walk, went out and began to chide them for their familiarity with such a person, and commanded them to come to him immediately. "Do not be angry, Sir, with your dear children," said Hardy, addressing Mr. Benson, "for I have many a time in former years carried you in these arms, and led you about this garden—have you forgot your old servant, Hardy?" "Forgot my old servant, Hardy! no," said Mr. B. running and taking him by the hand, "I remember you still, though your skin has been darkened by the sun, and wrinkled by age. You are welcome to this house, and here you may almost fancy yourself young again, while you review the scenes of youth."

When they arrived at the mansion of Mr. Benson, Edward and Amelia were busily employed in the kitchen, waiting upon the aged soldier: they brought him the old arm-chair, which he said he knew fifty years ago, and they seemed emulous which should be most active and diligent in serving him; while he continued thanking them, and declaring that he ought rather to wait upon them. Mr. and Mrs. Benson stood at some little distance, beholding with conscious pleasure the benevolent exertions of their amiable children, who had enjoyed the unspeakable advantages of a pious education, which they appeared to value and improve. Young persons should always esteem it their duty and their happiness to relieve the distressed, and to do good by all the means in their power; especially those who have been taught to love God with all their hearts, and to love their neighbours as themselves.

While they were thus employed, old Isaac, the shepherd, walked to the kitchen, leaning on his crook, and followed by his shaggy-
 eared dog: immediately as Hardy observed him, he started from his
 seat, and ran to embrace his old play-mate and fellow-servant. The
 meeting was mutually delightful; they had never expected to see each
 other again, the sweet scenes of youthful days arose to their minds,
 and their feelings were so strong that they could not utter them. See-
 ing this, Mr. Benson beckoned to his children to come away, and leave
 the two old friends to themselves.

Edward and Amelia, when they were seated in the parlour, related
 to their parents the manner in which they had become acquainted with
 Hardy, and they requested their father to tell them something about
 the early part of his life. "Hardy's father," said Mr. Benson,
 "lived in the service of your grandfather; and all his children, as soon
 as they were able to work, were employed on his estate. Hardy was
 a sharp clever lad, of a remarkably easy and mild disposition. My
 father taught him the first principles of knowledge, and indeed was
 rather partial to him, on account of his cheerfulness and willingness to
 oblige. He was quite a favourite with me, and with all my young
 companions, because he was so good tempered, and so fond of chil-
 dren: nothing pleased him so much as to take a walk with us, and to
 join in our little amusements. He seemed a well-disposed lad; but
 when he grew up to be a man, he became connected with some bad
 companions, who gradually led him astray, and at last persuaded him
 to despise the simple toil of a peasant's life, and to enlist as a soldier.
 I recollect the time when Hardy came to take leave of us: I loved
 him so much that I could not refrain from tears, and he seemed ex-
 ceedingly grieved to part with me. Your grandfather gave him some
 excellent advice, and some pious books, before he departed; but since
 he left us, we have heard nothing of him till the present day, and we
 supposed that he had lost his life in battle."

When Mr. Benson had concluded his account, Edward went up to
 him and took hold of his hand, while Amelia climbed up his knee;
 and they both joined in requesting their father to give Hardy the little
 cottage upon the hill, in which he was born, and to take care of him
 in his old age. Their father told them that he was delighted to see
 the generous warmth of their dispositions, but that benevolence should
 always be guided by prudence. He was pleased with what he had
 lately heard of Hardy's character, but it would be necessary to ex-
 amine it with greater care, before they engaged to support him. "If
 it should appear," said he, "on examination, that he is become a vir-
 tuous and pious man, we will then consider how we can relieve him in

the best manner, and your father's assistance will assuredly not be wanting, if it can be properly bestowed."

After dinner, the young people obtained permission from their parents to bring Hardy into the parlour. They both of them ran into the kitchen to carry the invitation: there they found the two aged friends talking of old times and acquaintances, while the plough-boys and maid-servants were listening eagerly to their conversation. It was difficult to part them, and Hardy was obliged to promise that he would spend the evening at Isaac's cottage before he was permitted to go.

When Hardy was seated, Edward placed his chair on one side, and Amelia on the other, and they immediately began to ask him a great number of curious questions on a variety of subjects: what countries he had visited?—what battles he had fought?—what victories were obtained?—and what wounds he had received? Hardy answered their inquiries in so interesting a manner that he gained their affections, and soon became their favourite. Edward promised that he would save part of his pocket-money for Hardy, and would make him welcome to some of the fruit from his own little garden. Amelia said she would make him a new shirt, and knit him a warm pair of stockings against the winter. Mr. Benson having remained a silent spectator for some time, at length requested his children to be quiet; and desired Hardy to give an account of himself from the time he left his native village to the present period.

Hardy, in compliance with the request of Mr. Benson, commenced his narrative, as follows:—"Your honour recollects the time when allured and deceived by some idle and vicious companions, I enlisted as a soldier, and thus forsook the service of your respected father, whose kindness I shall never cease to remember. My youthful imagination was full of the pleasures and honours which I expected to receive in a short time, and I never thought of any dangers or hardships which I might experience. How often do the young indulge these foolish and deceitful hopes! At first, I was marched about to different places in England; I soon found my expectations false, and earnestly wished that I could leave my musket and return to the plough; but this was impossible. I quickly forgot the pious instructions which I received from your excellent father, and though in the beginning I was shocked at the profaneness and depravity of my comrades, yet, being accustomed to behold it, I soon learned to imitate their evil examples.

"In a few years our regiment received orders to embark for foreign service. I felt some degree of sorrow at quitting my native country and shed a tear or two as we lost sight of that land which we never expected to revisit. However, those feelings were soon lost amidst the bustle, the gaiety, and the laughter of sinful companions. Though

my countenance often bore the appearance of mirth and cheerfulness, yet, when I reflected, conscience made me miserable, and I possessed no real heart-cheering happiness. The religious impressions made on my youthful heart were never entirely obliterated, though I ardently wished that I could banish every sentiment of remorse from my mind, and commit sin without compunction: but this I found impossible.

“ We were engaged abroad in many battles, too numerous to mention. I have often seen whole ranks of my fellow-soldiers hurried into an eternal world; three times I have been wounded, and once was left for dead on the field of battle. Notwithstanding these awful scenes, my heart was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and I became increasingly depraved. Thus I went on for many years, thoughtless of God and an eternal world; but I was at length arrested in my mad career by the hand of disease. I was confined to the hospital, and lay for many months upon the bed of sickness, in great pain of body, and still greater distress of mind. My old jovial companions now almost forsook me, or if they paid me a visit, I found that their mirth and laughter only increased my sufferings. In these circumstances I resolved to read attentively the books which your father gave me, and which I had carefully preserved; from them I derived much instruction, especially from the Bible, which I have ever since carried in my knapsack.

“ At this time I very much felt the want of a Christian friend, to whom I could disclose my feelings, and who could instruct me on many subjects which I could not understand. At length, I recollected that there was an old Scotch Highlander in our regiment, whom I had often ridiculed for his piety: to him I was at first ashamed to lend, till I recollected various instances in which he shewed his kindness to those who had abused him. I sent, and the same evening Douglas (for that was his name) came, and placed himself by my bedside. I immediately began to beg his pardon for the injuries I had done to him in former times; but he desired me to feel no uneasiness on that account, as he always made a point, when reproached by his companions, to offer a silent prayer to God on their behalf; and he hoped that his petitions for me would now be answered. I then told him that I had received a pious education, had frequently felt religious impressions which were afterwards effaced, and was exceedingly alarmed at my present situation, lest I should be unprepared for an eternal state to which I might probably soon be summoned.

“ Douglas endeavoured to give me all the information in his power: he told me to examine my own heart, to consider my past life, and to ascertain my present feelings. He displayed the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and my own inability to save myself, in the most striking man-

ner. He said that if I were not indisposed, I should not need the physician ; so, if my soul were not infected with the malady of sin, I should not feel any necessity for a Saviour. "I answered, that it was a deep sense of my sins which made me unhappy, and a consciousness of my weakness which led me to look for support from some other source. He said, if such were my sentiments, the gospel of Jesus Christ was exactly suited to my case ; for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. ' We have all deserted our lawful general and sovereign,' continued he, ' and gone over to the army of Sin and Satan ; we have loved their service, and have worn their uniform. We deserved the severest vengeance which the King of kings and Lord of lords could inflict ; but the Son of our Sovereign, the Captain of salvation, the Prince of peace, while in his Father's court, beheld our deplorable situation, and loved and pitied us. He frequently sent forth messengers, and proclamations of mercy, to invite the rebels to return ; but the great majority still preferred the service of the usurper, and rejoiced in the dominion of the prince of darkness. At length, the only begotten Son of God resolved to quit the court of heaven, to take upon him the nature of man, to enter the camp of the enemy, and invite the rebels to return to their legitimate Ruler. He came, not with the sword of justice, or the thunders of vengeance, but with messages of pardon, peace, and happiness. The prince of this world was immediately alarmed ; he excited his subjects to reject these offers of mercy : he armed his soldiers, and they seized the Ambassador of heaven—they crucified the Lord of life and glory. We might have supposed that God would instantly punish these rebels with the severest vengeance, and that none who had so offended would ever find mercy ; but no : he raised his Son from the grave to sit at his right hand ; and now forgiveness, salvation, and eternal happiness are proclaimed to every penitent sinner, through the merits of Jesus Christ. Thousands have accepted these merciful invitations ; they have enlisted in the army of the Lord of hosts ; they have put on the whole armour of God ; they have fought the good fight of faith ; they have vanquished their enemies ; and now are singing the songs of victory, and praising their glorious leader in heaven. Many Christian warriors are still in the scene of conflict ; they feel that the contest is severe, and that their adversary is exceedingly subtle and powerful : now he boldly attacks, then he conceals himself in ambush—sometimes he appears inactive, that we may become unwatchful, at other times his assaults are impetuous, that we may despair. Our enemy is continually endeavouring to seduce us again to his service, and he will surely succeed if we are not careful and dependant on our Captain for assistance. Nor will our contest and danger cease till we have obtain-

ed the victory over death ; and then every faithful warrior will join in the triumphs of his glorious Leader. Oh ! may we be there to partake the joy, and sing the praises of Emanuel !”

“ These representations of the gospel, so suited to a soldier, were repeatedly enforced in different conversations by Douglas, who was an experienced veteran in the Christian warfare. He explained the scriptures, and prayed with me as often as he could, and I found my knowledge of divine things constantly increasing ; so that I have the best reason to say, ‘ It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.’ It pleased God gradually to restore me to better health, though still with much remaining weakness ; and I trust the seeds of religion which were sown in my heart, and watered by affliction, grew and became flourishing when strength returned. I was enabled to forsake my old companions, and with Douglas, and two or three other pious soldiers, I found it pleasant and profitable to maintain friendship founded on Christian principles. I was not strong enough to bear arms again, and being almost worn out in the service by fatigue and age, I was ordered to return to my native country. I shall never forget the time when I parted from Douglas and the pious soldiers : we spent the whole night together in prayer and religious conversation ; in the morning, they accompanied me to the boat, and we took leave of each other with mutual regret.

“ After a tempestuous voyage, we arrived at Portsmouth. The sight of old England delighted my heart. I hastened on shore, and behind a rock offered my most grateful praises to the God of ever mercy, I have walked from thence, and am at length arrived at this place, so sweet to my memory—so dear to my heart. In this village I hope to spend my few remaining days, and to sleep in the grave where my fathers are buried ; there the weary are at rest, and then the Christian soldier will reach his heavenly country, and his eternal home.

Mr. and Mrs. Benson, and their children, were exceedingly pleased with Hardy’s interesting story. In a few days they settled him in his little native cottage, and crowned his old age with comfort and peace. When the writer of this account lately visited his friend Mr. Benson he went to Hardy’s cabin, and was much pleased with his gratitude and seriousness. Edward and Amelia were then in the bloom of youth, the comfort of their parents, and the friends of the poor ; in them benevolence and wisdom, respectability and piety are happily united.

THE END.