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AGNES MORTON.



AGNES MORTON;

OR,

THE IDOLATRY OF THE HEART.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE BREAD OF DECEIT," "CHRISTIAN TRIALS,"

"THE LENT LILIES," &c.

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THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GOD'S BEFORE
ME.—EXODUS XX. 3.

WHEREFORE, MY DEARLY BELOVED, FLEE FROM
IDOLATRY.—1 COR. X. 14.

AGNES MORTON.

CHAPTER I.

*"Every founder is confounded by the graven image ;
for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no
breath in them."*—Jerem. x. 14.

"Well, I thank God my lot was not cast in a land of Idolaters," observed a respectably-dressed working-woman, as she closed a Missionary Record.

"Idolaters!" said her son, a lad of eight years old, "Who are they, mother?"

"Heathens, my dear, who bow their knee to images, and gods of their own

devising. I was just then reading of a nation called the Gallas,* who make long pilgrimages, or journeys to a large tree, which they address for the object they desire, believing it able to help them in every distress."

"What! ask a tree to help them," exclaimed her son, with surprise, "a tree which they can cut down, and burn when they will?"

"Yes, Charles, they are poor, ignorant folks, who do not know better, you see."

"But why do they not know better?" resumed Charles, "Are not Missionaries sent to teach them to pray to God Almighty? I thought the money collected by means of Missionary-meetings, and Missionary-boxes, was all for that purpose."

* A people who surround Shoa, and extend into central Africa.

“Very true, my dear,” said an intelligent-looking woman, who had just concluded her labours at a mangle, “but it is a lamentable fact, that thousands have, as yet, been unvisited by any minister of the Gospel: ‘*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;*’ (Matt. ix. 37.) Numbers even in our own settlements abroad, are living in a state of savage ignorance, without the blessing of Christian schools, or the regular ministry of a Christian Pastor.”

“Sure enough, Mrs. Lockwood,” resumed the first speaker, “I have a nephew who went to North America as a settler, and he wrote to his friends in England, that he had travelled through a space of four hundred miles, where there were but four villages where public worship was regularly performed throughout the year, and he and his

wife walked twenty miles to get their child baptized."

"Oh! I remember hearing my cousin's letter read," exclaimed the little boy, eagerly. "One of the Churches he mentioned was built of mud, and another of pine. I like hearing about foreign parts. If those idolaters of whom you were reading, are ever brought to believe in the true God, how strange and foolish all their false worship will appear to them."

"An interesting example of this conviction is related of a heathen chief," observed Mrs. Lockwood. "He was awakened to the vanity of idolatry by hearing the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah read and explained by that devoted Missionary, Mr. Williams. The sixteenth verse came with especial power to his mind, and he reflected for the first time, on the excessive folly of making

a God, and cooking food from one and the same tree. For a while, the newly-awakened chief seemed lost in wonder, and when he retired for the night, he spent it in conversing upon the inspired truths he had heard, frequently rising and stamping with amazement, that he should have been deluded so long, and expressing his determination, never again to worship false Gods. ‘Eyes,’ said he, ‘they have; but wood cannot see; ears they have; but wood cannot hear.’”

“Poor man,” observed Ellen Morris, the first speaker, “when he was once brought to know the truth, he was sure to feel confounded by the vanity of the graven image. It is a sad thing that there are so many idolatrous heathens in the world.”

“Would that the heathens were the only idolaters,” said Mrs. Lockwood, thoughtfully.

“ Well, I hope they *are* the only idolaters,” said Ellen Morris, looking up with great simplicity. “ The Jews must be very wrong, or they would believe in Jesus Christ, as we do, but I suppose that you would not call them idolaters.”

“ I was thinking just then, of the idolatry of professing Christians,” replied Mrs. Lockwood.

“ Christians,” retorted Ellen, hastily, “ why, what do you think idolatry means, pray ? ”

“ I would endeavour to take the sense of scripture, neighbour,” returned Mrs. Lockwood, “ the first and second commandments are especially directed against the sin of idolatry, the first telling us, *whom* we are to worship, and the second shewing the supreme nature of that worship, which the true God demands. We should recollect too, that our Saviour has said, ‘ *Thou shalt love the Lord thy*

God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' (Matt. xxii. 37.) If then we serve the creature more than the Creator, or if we permit any object to act more upon our fears, or claim more of our trust than him, we surely offend against the spirit of the commandment."

"Well," returned Ellen Morris, "I have often thought the Romanists must offend, when they pray to the Virgin and the Saints. It is giving them a share of the honour which is alone due to the Saviour, you know." Ellen was proceeding, when she casually met the eye of a young woman, who had been silently watching a sleeping infant, during the whole of the previous conversation. She was evidently affected at the last remark, and the rising colour in her cheeks told some tale, which even Ellen was not slow to discover.

“ Dear me,” exclaimed the latter, as the perception appeared to strike her, and here Ellen paused for a moment, when turning abruptly, she observed ; “ but what do you think of such matters, Mrs. Lockwood ! ”

“ The word of God should be our guide in all such matters,” returned Mrs. Lockwood, calmly, “ it is the only unerring one. Speaking by his prophet Isaiah, the Lord sheweth, why he called himself to Moses a jealous God. He say, ‘ *I am the Lord ; that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another.*’ (Isaiah xlii. 8 : again, ‘ *I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour.*’ (Isaiah xliii. 11.) ‘ *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth : for I am God and there is none else.*’ (Isaiah xlv. 22.) Our blessed Redeemer follows this up by the solemn words, ‘ I am the way,

the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' (John xiv. 6.) With respect to the invocation of the Saints, or any created being, I would urge St. Peter's reply to Cornelius, (Acts x. 25, 26,) and the angel's words to St. John, '*See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God:*' (Rev. xix. 10.) I think however," she continued, "that we may incur the charge of idolatry, as much without an outward figure as with one, '*The law is spiritual:*' (Rom. vii. 14.), extending to the inclinations of the heart, as well as the outward act. Thus the Bible tells us that '*covetousness is idolatry:*' (Col. iii. 5,) and we may have an idolatrous attachment for wealth, pleasure, business, or any worldly object we make our supreme concern."

"Well, I once heard a clergyman

say, that Demas made an idol of the world when he forsook the work of Christ," observed Ellen, "still, I would fain hope, that, in these days, when the Scriptures are so widely diffused, and our young ones are admitted in infancy into Christ's Church, that we shall know better than to be ensnared by such vanities."

"We are blessed with high privileges no doubt," returned Mrs. Lockwood, "may we be taught by better wisdom than our own the duties they involve; neither baptism, nor the knowledge of the Scriptures, will avail for our eternal safety, unless we walk as children of Him in whose holy name we have been baptized. We have been made Christians by profession; but are we so in practice? Are we daily seeking the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, to purify our corrupt hearts, and raise our

fallen nature from the death of sin to the life of righteousness? The unenlightened heathens are in a more hopeful state than we, if we sin against the light we have received. We are bought with a price, (1 Cor. vi. 20,) and if we would be Christians indeed, we must "*glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirits which are God's.*"

CHAPTER II.

" Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."—Heb. iv. 14.

I shall begin this chapter with a few particulars respecting the young woman, who appeared distressed by her neighbour's remarks. Her name was Agnes Morton—she was a widow, and the mother of an only child, who was at this period about a twelvemonth old. The parents of Agnes were poor working people, who, as long as they were spared to their child, sought earnestly by prayer and instruction, as well as by example,

to lead her in the path to heaven. Agnes was left an orphan at the age of sixteen—she was very inexperienced; but, young as she was, she had heard and witnessed much of the importance of a stedfast Christian profession. Her parents were members of the Church of England. They had often talked to her of the spiritual nature of its services, and of the blessedness of a grounded and settled faith; solemnly reminding her of the fallen nature of man, and his inability to turn and prepare himself for heaven, without Divine Grace. Agnes was in service when her parents died:—she felt attached to her employers, and remained with them during the next three years, when she married Richard Morton, a journeyman mason, in a neighbouring village.

For so important a step, the reader may wish to learn if the choice of Agnes

were such as her parents would have approved. They would have esteemed Richard for his kind feelings and steady habits, but they would have grieved deeply over their daughter's marriage with a Roman Catholic, for such was his persuasion. Agnes unhappily did not give the subject much serious thought. She knew that Richard bore a respectable character; and though, at first, she often felt a rising dread of the temptation she might incur by marrying a Romanist, she gradually ceased to consider the difference of faith any material objection.

How often has the remark of an eminent minister been verified, that "looking back, is more than we can sustain, without going back." So weak is human nature, that Agnes insensibly fell back in her Christian course, from the period when she made religion a secondary con-

cern. Her husband had consented that she should attend Church whenever she wished it; but as he often remained at home on these occasions, she began to think that, when he did not feel inclined to go to his Chapel, she might as well bear him company; and he seemed so pleased, when she was at hand to talk with him, that Agnes became less and less unwilling to absent herself from the house of God. As the Roman Catholic Chapel was five miles distant, Richard rarely went so far in the winter season, except on particular festivals, and his wife having reconciled herself to the neglect of the means of grace, passed her sabbaths at home also. When we become insensible to the blessings of public worship, our hearts are not likely to be warmly affected towards our Maker in private; and hence, the most solemn Scriptural truths fall as the seed

upon stony places. (Matt. xiii. 5, 6, 20, 21.)

Time passed on, and Agnes became the mother of a fine little girl, who was the plaything and delight of both parents. When the little one was baptized, the father and mother once more kneeled together in prayer; but this was their last time; and, during the next twelvemonth, Agnes never once joined in public worship. She pleaded the care of her child, while the real cause rested with her own inclinations, and a heart growing more and more indifferent to its spiritual welfare.

A heavy affliction awaited her at the commencement of the new year. Her husband was attacked with severe illness, which rendered him insensible for a considerable period. Within a few hours of his death, he appeared to revive; and, seeing his wife weep, asked if he was

thought to be in danger. Agnes, though aware of the sad fact, that all hope was past, was too heart-stricken to reply ; and, on his repeating the question, Mrs. Lockwood, who had kindly offered her services in the sick room, was under the painful necessity of informing him of his situation. The poor man apparently anticipating the truth, faintly articulated the name of his Priest, and his whole care seemed now to rest on his reception of the last rites of his religion before he died.

In pursuance of his desire, Mrs. Lockwood dispatched a messenger to the village where the Roman Catholic Priest resided, to request his immediate attendance on a dying member of his flock. Two hours necessarily elapsed, before the errand-boy could return ; and hours seemed ages to the poor sufferer, who became more and more disquieted with

the fear that he should soon be beyond the reach of those ordinances, to which, like too many, he clung in his dying hour for safety. Agnes shared his distress, without the power of suggesting consolation, nor when her poor misguided husband ignorantly called on the blessed Virgin to plead his cause with God, had she strength sufficient to direct him to the "*One Mediator between God and men*," (1 Tim. ii. 5,) of whom Scripture saith, "*There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts iv. 12.)

In this trying hour, Mrs. Lockwood endeavoured to lead her afflicted neighbours to the true and only refuge. She knew, that Romanists as well as Protestants, believe in a crucified Saviour; but she deeply lamented that the former should ascribe to angels, or any created being, a part in the mediatorial office.

She, therefore, gently reminded Richard that, "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;*" (John iii. 16.) That the *blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;*" (1 John i. 7.) and that his believing servants should look above created things to him. "Our state as sinners," she added, "would be hopeless without Christ, we cannot make atonement for our offences, but *Christ 'is able to save them to the uttermost, that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.'*" (Heb. vii. 25.)

The dying man listened attentively, and seemed to gather consolation and hope; he feebly raised his hand, and first looking upwards, and then on his weeping wife, he softly said, "Christ have mercy upon us."

At that moment the house door opened, and a child ran hastily up stairs, with the intelligence that the Roman Catholic Priest was come. The poor man's eye suddenly kindled, with somewhat of its former energy, but this was the last glimmering of expiring nature. The very fulfilment of his wishes was more than his exhausted frame could bear, and ere his pastor reached the house of mourning, the sufferer had breathed his last.

It would be needless to follow the afflicted widow through the first painful scenes, which succeeded her husband's decease. We shall, therefore, resume our narrative after an interval of three months, when Agnes was on the eve of leaving the cottage, where she had lived since her marriage. Richard had belonged to a Friendly Society, by which provision, his wife was relieved in her hour of need, of the first heavy expences

attending his death ; and, with the remainder of his savings, she bought a mangle as a means of support for herself and her infant. This plan was suggested by Ellen Morris, a laundress, who was distantly related to Agnes. Ellen was herself a widow, and a person of quick and kind feelings ; but she greatly needed the humble spirit which invariably attends right views of Divine truth. Not so Mrs. Lockwood, who was deeply impressed with the solemn conviction, that, "*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.*" (Prov. xxviii. 26,) and that, "*our sufficiency is of God.*" (2 Cor. iii. 5.) Hence, she felt her need of Divine guidance through daily dangers, and daily duties ; and fearful lest she should wander from the path of eternal life, she prayed earnestly that God would lead her on from strength to strength, till her portion was assigned her in the mansions of the redeemed for ever.

CHAPTER III.

"Ye worship—ye know not what."—John iv. 22.

BEFORE we proceed with the history of Agnes Morton, we must say a few words respecting the husband of Mrs. Lockwood.

He was a man of whom it would be commonly said, that, "he had seen better days." He had certainly been brought up with higher worldly expectations than were afterwards realized. His father was a respectable farmer, and might have done well, had he not been tempted to live beyond his means, by which, he became eventually a ruined

man. At the death of his parents, young Lockwood had no resources beyond his own exertions. As apprentice to a druggist, he had acquitted himself so much to the satisfaction of his master, that he was retained in his service as foreman. He then married, and the following year began business, in a small way, for himself; and his prospects were rapidly improving, when he was attacked with such severe and protracted illness, that he was left a cripple, dependant on the exertions of others. Years of sickness and infirmity had since passed over his head. Years, which many would have thought hardly supportable,—but our invalid afforded a bright proof that God's ways are higher than ours (Isaiah lv. 9.), and that he is able to cheer, strengthen, and sustain those who humbly cast their burdens upon him. Thomas Lockwood was a general favourite; he was so kind,

patient, and thoughtful for others. His village neighbours eagerly imparted their cares to him, for they were sure to meet with sympathy. And, although his knowledge was of a higher order, they felt its Christian influence. His wife had opened a small grocery shop, since her husband's illness, which she conducted with great industry and punctuality.

On the morning fixed for the widow's departure, Mrs. Lockwood proceeded at an early hour towards her house, to see if she could in any way assist her.

As she approached, she paused a moment in the garden, where Agnes had passed many a cheerful hour with her husband. A profusion of gay spring flowers lately graced the sunny border; but a keen frost and chilling storm, had ushered in the month of April, and in a single night, vegetation seemed suddenly cut off. The pink blossom of the

almond was still visible ; but it displayed its delicate flowers amidst snow, and the few hardy plants that had weathered the blast, seemed to stand in mournful contrast to the many that were laid low. How true to nature, thought Mrs. Lockwood, are the words of the Psalmist ; “ *As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*” (Psalm ciii. 15, 16.) How different that glorious world “ where everlasting spring abides, and never-fading flowers”—where “ *the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him.*” (Psalm ciii. 17.) In another moment she entered the house, where Agnes was leaning mournfully over the fire, with the little girl on her knee. Beside her stood a box

partly packed, and a few articles of clothing were laid together on the floor.

"I am come early this morning to give you a helping hand, neighbour," said Mrs. Lockwood, good-humouredly. "Come, you must set me to work; shall I pack up the clothes for you?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Lockwood, you are very kind to come so early; but I cannot go to-day," replied the widow.

"Why, what has happened?" said Mrs. Lockwood, anxiously; "I thought that Friday suited better than any other day for your journey, on account of the carrier passing your door."

"Yes, but I never gave the day a thought until this morning," said Agnes. "I had my things half packed, as you see, when old Mattie Morris came in, and asked, what could possess me to go to a fresh place on so unlucky a day as Friday?"

“ But Agnes,” said Mrs. Lockwood, earnestly, “ you surely would not believe that God makes our welfare dependant upon such trifling matters as these.”

“ Oh ! I only know what folks say,” replied the widow, with tears in her eyes, “ my precious child is all I have left, and I dare not risk my own judgment in such secret things.”

“ God forbid that we should ever presume to know more than the Lord has thought fit to tell us,” said Mrs. Lockwood, with fervour. “ Scripture says, that ‘ *The secret things belong unto the Lord our God,*’ (Deut. xxix. 29.) that, ‘ *he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou ?*’ (Dan. iv. 35.) Let us seek the Lord and his blessing, dear neighbour, in his own appointed way, and not by

charms, superstitions, and such vanities of human invention."

"I am sure I never intended to lose sight of the Lord's help and blessing," replied Agnes, sorrowfully. "I have never given my mind to charms, or unlucky days before; but when I heard all that Mattie said, I felt staggered, and I thought to myself, 'if vanities they be, they are harmless ones, if they do no good, they can do no evil, surely.'"

"There I fear you mistake," replied Mrs. Lockwood, calmly, "people may talk of harmless vanities, but in the book of God, we find no such distinction. Speaking of the sins of the Jews, the Lord said, '*They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God: they have provoked me to anger with their vanities:*'" (Deut. xxxii. 21.) and in another part it is said, "*Surely God*

will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.' " (Job xxxv. 13.)

Agnes was silent for a few minutes. "If I could but see my way," she resumed, "I should not give half the heed to things that stagger me now."

"You deceive yourself there, I think," said Mrs. Lockwood. "God has ordained that *"we walk by faith, not by sight:"* (2 Cor. v. 7.) and if the tempter incite us to rise against this sentence, let us meet doubt with the question, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?*" (Gen. xviii. 25.) Remember the awful consequences of coveting forbidden knowledge, in the persons of Adam and Eve: they were gifted with faculties above all creatures of this lower world, but they aspired to those of the God of Heaven, (Gen. iii. 4, 5, 6). When they had tasted of the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened, but they beheld what it

was their happiness *not* to know ; the bitter fruits of sin. By that one act, our first parents lost the Divine image from their souls, and brought upon their posterity, all the sin, disease, and death to which we are subject in this mortal life."

Here Mrs. Lockwood paused, and with feelings of pleasure, she heard her companion confirm what she had said, by softly reciting the verse, '*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*'" (Rom. v. 12.)

Seeing Agnes thus thoughtful, Mrs. Lockwood proceeded as follows :—

" Thanks be to God, who in judgment remembered mercy, and provided a refuge for fallen man, even his beloved Son, who took our nature upon him to suffer instead of a rebellious world.

Had our Heavenly Father pardoned us without a sacrifice, we might have doubted how far sin was hateful to him ; but justice and mercy met in the glorious work of Redemption. God laid help for sinners on one who was mighty to save, *who*, being God and man in one person, was able to effect all that our necessities required. As man, he could die on the cross for sin ; and, as God, he could make that atonement available for the eternal salvation of sinners."

Agnes seemed impressed with these truths, and Mrs. Lockwood had, at least the satisfaction of leaving her in a more profitable frame of thought than she found her. At this period, therefore, she bade her neighbour farewell, accompanying her shake of the hand, with the entreaty, that Agnes would not fail to command her services, if they could be useful.

Upon Mrs. Lockwood's return, she told her husband the result of her visit. Thomas was grieved to hear of the vain terrors which had been suggested to the mind of poor Agnes, and he was just beginning to draw a comparison between the idolatry of the heathen, and the superstitious practices and pretensions of some professing Christians; when the shop-door opened, and old Mattie Morris made her appearance, attended by her little grandson Charles, whom we introduced to the reader at an early period of our history. Mattie came only to buy grocery, but Thomas was so engrossed with the subject of his wife's late interview, that he would have found it next to impossible not to revert to it.

"Mattie," said he, "I wish you had not dissuaded Agnes from leaving to-day."

"I had good reason for doing so," returned Mattie, with a knowing look.

“ Had you indeed ? ” said he. “ Well, good reasons should be attended to ; but what were they ? ”

“ I would not have her settle afresh on so unlucky a day ; ” said Mattie, sturdily, “ and I took wiser counsel than my own to determine it.”

“ But what authority have we for calling Friday an unlucky day ? ” said Thomas, calmly, “ not Scripture, surely.”

“ I do not pretend to be as good a scholar as you, Mr. Lockwood,” said Mattie hastily, “ but I laid the matter before Peter Buzzard, or, as some call him, the wise man, for his knowledge of mysterious and future events, you know.”

“ Say, rather, his pretensions to hidden knowledge,” said Thomas, earnestly, “ Oh ! Mattie, you endanger your spiritual interests, when you give ear to such impious delusions.”

“ I don’t tell lies, Mr. Lockwood,” said Mattie, “ if Peter does : he is very wicked, but I do no harm in consulting him : many a lost and stolen article, has been recovered by his wonderful knowledge, and how he gets insight, no one knows.”

“ I think I could guess,” said Thomas : “ I would also remind you, neighbour, that we may do ourselves harm by even encouraging such pretensions. Moses, speaking by Divine direction to the Israelites, said, ‘ *There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits :*’ mark that expression ‘ *consult-er,*’ and see what follows in the next verse, ‘ *For all that do these things are*

an abomination unto the Lord.' (Deut. xviii. 10, 11, 12.)

"Well then," said Mattie, who was becoming rather anxious to turn the accusation from herself, "I suppose you think those young gentlemen and ladies hurt themselves, when they walked to the gypsies' camp last summer, to have their fortunes told."

"I do most certainly : for I think they went to make a jest of a sin, which, both by word and example, they should have done their best to discountenance. When I hear of any one pretending to reveal the unsearchable things of God, I think of that striking experience of Solomon, '*Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun ; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it : yea farther, though*

a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.' (Eccles, viii. 17.)

"But Saul went to inquire of the prophet Samuel after his father's lost property," (1 Samuel ix,) said Mattie.

"Very true, but recollect the miraculous calling of Samuel, (1 Samuel iii.) I say this to remind you, that the Lord's prophets all bore, in one way or another, extraordinary evidences of the Divine Mission.—The Jews would not have been condemned for the rejection of the Saviour, if he had not manifested forth his glory, and proved his Divine origin by working miracles, for thus our Lord said, '*If I had not done among them the work which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*' (John xv. 24.)

"That is plain certainly," said Mattie.

“ On the otherhand,” resumed Thomas, “ Scripture reprobates all witchcraft as rebellion, (1 Samuel xv. 23), or the act of seeking after other powers than God. It is a kind of idolatry in its remotest bearings, opposed to the spirit of our Christian religion.”

“ Religion ! ” said Mattie, raising her glasses to look him more fully in the face, “ I go to preaching here, and preaching there, and do you not call that religion ? ”

“ No, Mattie, I view religion as a principle of faith in the heart, proving itself to be *living* faith by consistent earnestness to fulfil the commandments of God. St. James says, you know, ‘ *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* ’ (James i. 22.) We cannot feel too thankful to hear the Gospel preached, but let us not mistake the means of spiritual improvement for

the thing itself. The best ministers are but instruments in the hands of their Maker, and we may hear the ablest sermons without profit, if we neglect to pray that God's Spirit may accompany his word." Mattie looked grave, and refrained from any further remark, for she felt conscious, that she went from one place of worship to another, to have her ears gratified by something new, rather than to have her heart impressed with the '*faithfulness and truth of God's counsels of old.*' (Isaiah xxv. 1.) Hastily taking up the articles she had purchased, she wished Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood good morning, a salutation which they returned very kindly.

"Poor old woman," said Thomas, when she had closed the door, "I wish she had clearer impressions of her duty. I almost fear she worships, she knows not what."

CHAPTER IV.

"Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men : and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."—Acts xix. 19, 20.

THE last rays of the setting sun were gilding the horizon, when a soft tap was heard at Mrs. Lockwood's door, and Agnes Morton entered with her child in her arms. There was something like returning animation mingled with timidity in her countenance, as she responded to the kindly welcome of Thomas and his wife, while she added, that, if they

were not otherwise engaged, she wished to speak a few words to them.

“As many as you like,” replied Thomas, good-humouredly, “we shall not have any more customers this evening, I think, and if we have, they need not interrupt you.”

“I wished,” said Agnes, “to tell Mrs. Lockwood how much I have thought over all that she said this morning, about seeking the Lord’s blessing in his own appointed way. I have since felt so vexed with myself for hearkening as I did to Mattie, that I would fain part with the very charms she gave me, as a security against bodily and spiritual evil.” And here Agnes drew from her pocket a small leaden ring, which, with evident traces of confusion, she shewed to Mrs. Lockwood.

“Act up to your convictions,” said Mrs. Lockwood, earnestly, “and return

this worse than foolish charm to Mattie. Say that you dare not look for God's blessing on means directly contrary to those he has appointed."

"I am ready to throw the ring into the fire, if you wish it," said Agnes, colouring, "but I would rather not speak so plainly to Mattie. She would not be convinced by any thing I said, and it might make ill-will between us; we are relations, you know."

"I should be very sorry that either I or my wife should cause ill-will between any body," said Thomas, kindly, "but I think, Agnes, when once you consider a practice sinful, you would do wrong to disclaim it on the one hand, and sanction it on the other."

"But if I threw the ring away, Mr. Lockwood, I could not sanction it, surely," returned Agnes.

"It would be something like an at-

tempt to serve God and Mammon," returned Thomas, "which Scripture tells us we cannot do. (Matt. vi. 24.) Having accepted this ring in the first instance, would not your silence naturally confirm Mattie in the idea, that you were still a partaker in these practices, think you?"

"I suppose it would," returned Agnes, timidly.

"Well then, if 'union is strength,' as the saying goes," said Thomas, "take courage, and retract the step that may add strength to sin, as St. Paul reminded the Corinthian converts, *"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing;"* and then he adds these encouraging words, *"and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."* (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.)

"There is the first step, I hope, God

helping me," said the widow, as she threw the charm into the fire.

"May God enable you thus to deal with every hindrance in your spiritual course," said Thomas, "go forth in his strength, and he will deliver you from unbelieving fears. But now, Agnes, before we close this subject, let me warn you against listening to the vain pretensions and persuasions of poor Mattie Morris; she is a weak-minded woman, and the tool, as it were, of a very artful man. One who insults the Supreme Majesty of the Almighty, by pretending to penetrate the secrets of futurity."

"You mean Peter Buzzard, who lately came to that new public house in the Cross-roads," said Agnes.

"Yes: I wish he had kept away from this neighbourhood altogether; for though he comes from a distance, a man's character is truly said to travel on his

heels, and I have heard sad things of him."

"I heard that he was a poacher before he came to this place," said Agnes, "but he seemed a civil man, just to speak a few words to, and that is all I know of him."

"The less the better," said Thomas, frankly. "When a man cannot refrain from unlawful practices in one instance, he is not likely to be honest in others. I have heard from good authority, that Peter's former house was the resort of all the poachers, thieves, and vagabonds, for miles round, and I believe that it is generally found that

Birds of a feather
Flock together."

Thomas was right in his conjecture. Peter was a man of very dishonest principles, and though he just feared the law

sufficiently to deter him from any open act of defiance, he was ever ready to accomplish by fraud, that which he durst not do by force. He possessed quick penetration, and plausible manners, and had contrived to gain considerable influence with some ignorant people, who actually believed that he was gifted with the power of divination. This idea was by no means displeasing to him, and he sedulously encouraged it for purposes which will hereafter be developed. Agnes was true to her convictions on this occasion. She felt impressed with the propriety of Thomas Lockwood's remarks; and on the following morning, she candidly declared the result to Mattie Morris. The old woman was much vexed with Agnes for parting with the charm, in which she protested there was some hidden virtue, which Thomas and his wife knew nothing about; but there the

matter was allowed to rest for an interval, and having completed the arrangements, which were suspended during the unlucky day in the impostor's calendar, the widow set off on Saturday, accompanied by Mattie and Ellen Morris, for her new abode. This was in a populous seafaring town, about four miles distant, where she had taken a lodging, with a fair prospect of employment. It was situated in a narrow space, which was literally crammed with houses, and the poor woman's countenance fell, as she contrasted this noisy scene with the quiet home she had left. Ellen Morris perceived her emotion, and bade her cheer up, saying, "every place seemed strange on first acquaintance: but this situation, though somewhat confined, was far handier to her mind, than those houses rising one above another, on either side of the cliffs. Here," continued she,

“you will be near the water, and the shops, and the streets where the visitors mostly lodge, but what an ascent to the Church ! only look at the height it stands above us.”

Agnes gazed silently on the Church, which was situated near the verge of the cliffs, with the ruins of an ancient abbey behind it. Sundry impressions connected with happier days rushed on her mind. She thought of the parish Church where her parents esteemed it a privilege to repair every sabbath, for prayer and spiritual instruction, and her conscience smote her, as she reflected upon her own neglect of God’s sacred ordinances. “ Oh ! Ellen,” said she, bursting into tears, as she spoke, “ how I wish I could see our own Church once more.”

“ Well,” replied Ellen, with her usual kindly feeling, “ Why should you not ? Come and take your dinner with us to-

morrow, and we will go to Church in the afternoon; you can bring the child you know."

Mattie joined in the proposal, and Agnes, who clung to every association with her former home, needed little pressing; her drooping spirits revived with the prospect for the following day, and her companions left her shortly after. Agnes had not yet learned to cast her care upon God, and though there were moments when she felt affected by Divine truth, and breathed a sigh, that she could experience its influence more practically, these good impressions were, however, transient, and she placed her main trust in the creature rather than the Creator. On the ensuing day, Agnes fulfilled her engagement, and after dinner, repaired to Church with Ellen Morris. Many humbling thoughts recurred to her mind, as she entered the

house of God ; and shē bore her part in the service with softened feelings, and a sense of her own unworthiness. When the congregation were dismissed, she relieved little Charles of the charge of her child, and proceeded towards the house of Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood.

“ I have heard some striking truths this afternoon,” said Agnes, thoughtfully, after she had been a few minutes seated, “ but your wife was at Church, Mr. Lockwood, and she will give you a far more correct account of them than I can.”

“ But I should really take it as a kindness if you would tell me as much as you can recollect,” returned Thomas, “ though illness unfits me for joining with the Lord’s congregation in person, I join with them in spirit ; and dearly do I prize the seed which my Christian neighbours gather for me in the house of God.”

“ Well, then,” said Agnes, “ a stranger preached in the place of the Rector, who is ill, and he dwelt very much on the character of the Pharisees, as described in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew. He remarked that all they did under the appearance of religion, was done for display, such as choosing the most prominent places for prayer, and enlarging their fringes and Phylacteries—these Phylacteries were passages of Scripture written on parchment, which they wore on the head and hand during morning prayer, under the superstitious notion, that the wearer thus fulfilled the words of Moses in Exodus. xiii. 9. The heathens, he said, had a superstitious custom of wearing something supposed to be charmed to free the wearer from disease or misfortune, which things they called Phylacteries, or preservatives. This reminded me of the leaden ring, and I felt

quite ashamed to find that I had *acted* myself, like a misguided idolater."

"May you lay the thought to heart," said Thomas:—"it is true, God will not be trifled with: and practices which may even admit of some palliation among heathens, must surely provoke his anger, when observed by those who enjoy the light of the Gospel."

"The clergyman also touched on the anxiety of the Pharisees to be spoken of as Rabbins," said Mrs. Lockwood, "and he remarked that there were many in these days as anxious to sacrifice every thing for worldly honour,—in fact they made that their idol."

"Oh yes, I wish I could remember more of that discourse," said Agnes, "it was so good; and how I wish old Mattie Morris had heard it too."

CHAPTER V.

"And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter ; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isaiah viii. 19, 20.

BUT where was Mattie during the interval of Divine Service? She was searching far and wide for some Dorking fowls, which she had missed that morning from their accustomed haunt. If there was one part of her possessions which the poor old woman prized beyond others, it

was these birds. The eggs had been sent to her by a distant friend, who was poultryman to a nobleman, and she had reared two fine chickens, which had already reached a promising size. Mattie had heard sundry marvellous tales of the large weight these birds had been known to attain, and she flattered herself that her treasures would do credit to her keeping, and realize her bright anticipations. All was right on the morning of the *lucky* day, when she accompanied Agnes to her new abode, and she charged a neighbour to feed her favourites, when they came to roost- under the anticipation of the probable lateness of her own return. This was duly performed, and the poor woman, who undertook the charge, gave full proof that she had housed them some hours before the return of the absentees. The cottage where Mattie and her daughter-in-law, Ellen, lived, was

separated from the village by a winding lane, shaded with rocks, and here and there a clump of holly and wild cherry. Beyond, was an open space of green sward, where potters were wont to encamp. One of Mattie's sympathizing friends suggested, that her henroost had probably been plundered by a vagrant of that description. Another blamed the fox.

"No fox would have carried them away so neatly," said Mattie, with a sigh, "there is not a feather dropped; and here are scarlet shreds enough to frighten away a fox, besides the old horse-shoe that I hung over the door for luck."

"Lucky or unlucky," said a third, "now you mention a fox, it reminds me, that I saw Mr. Buzzard's dog ranging in your direction last night. I daresay he was after some vermin of that kind."

"He might have followed our little

boy Charles," said Mattie ; " the lad is so fond of that animal, he brings it about the house at all hours. But I know what I will do ; I will go at once to Mr. Buzzard, and see if he will not make out the mystery."

Excited by this idea, Mattie broke away abruptly from her pitying neighbours. She neither heeded the lateness of the hour, nor the sacredness of the day. While the evening star rose with mild lustre, and the Church bell sent forth its last summons to evening service, she trudged away with a zeal deserving a better object, to consult him whom she regarded as " the wise man." Mr. Buzzard's house presented much the same aspect on the Lord's day as on week days. Three or four careless slovenly-looking men were lounging about the door smoking ; a noisy group within were equally wasting their time and energies over their

tankards, which, from time to time were replenished by the landlord's daughter, a bold-looking young woman, dressed ridiculously beyond her station. Meanwhile, Mrs. Buzzard, in working-clothes, and a dirty servant girl, in curl-papers, were baking and cooking with all their might.

"Surely you are preparing for a Mayor's dinner," said Mattie, who, for a moment, forgot the purpose of her visit.

Mrs. Buzzard looked impatient of interruption, and muttered something about having her hands full. Her husband was, however, more communicative. He nodded significantly, and then explained, "that his daughter's marriage was to take place on the following day, if all were lucky."

At the sound of the word "lucky," the old woman's countenance fell, and she

entered at once into the detail of her lost property.

Buzzard drew himself up, and listened with a look of importance, then beckoning her into a small back-room, he enquired whether she suspected any of her neighbours.

“No,” answered Mattie, with a deep drawn sigh, “I cannot fix a suspicion upon any one; there was a sale a few miles off you know, and nearly all our village folks were there that day. My nearest neighbours were not returned when I came home. Had I only left home with Agnes Morton, on the Friday, Tom Atkins would have been astir in the field that overlooks my henroost; but you said it would be unlucky to travel then, you know.”

“So I did,” said Buzzard, sturdily, “there are worse misfortunes than the loss of a couple of chickens, are there not?

Better that evil should befall your chickens than yourself, good woman," added he with a forcible shrug of his shoulders. Mattie almost trembled with this idea; and, the impostor perceiving the effect of his words, allowed her a few moments silence to consider them. He then walked to the further end of the room; and, opening a cupboard, which contained a jar of coffee-grounds, took two cups, and transferred a small portion of the grounds alternately between one and the other, all the while muttering a set of outlandish words, such as Mattie never heard a reasonable being utter before. When this was done, he poured the contents of the cup into a little bottle, and presented it to Mattie, saying, "We shall now know for certain, the fate of your birds, good woman.—Throw these coffee-grounds out of your window to-night precisely as the clock strikes twelve.

If your fowls are to be had alive, you will hear them cackle plainly enough ; if all be still, you may desist from further inquiry, for you will never see them again.

Mattie returned with her bottle ; and, eagerly awaited the hour of trial. Twelve o'clock struck, and she implicitly obeyed her adviser's directions ; but, not a sound of a chicken was heard. She wrung her hand with vexation, and one idle thought succeeding another, as in ill-regulated minds, they are wont to do, she first wondered why she was visited with such a misfortune, then whether she could have any evil wisher ; and, lastly, whether the charmed ring, which Agnes threw away, had any share in her troubles. This seemed the most likely conclusion, and she only needed the authority of Mr. Buzzard to establish it. She waited on him again, therefore, in the course of the

afternoon, and freely disclosed the above mentioned particulars. The wise man shook his head and looked very stern as he learned the fate of one of his charms, and he positively assured Mattie, that this untoward act on the part of Agnes, was the real cause of the mysterious disappearance of the fowls.

"They are gone for ever, good woman," he added, "any further attempt to discover the thief would be fruitless; you must try now to forget this misfortune."

In support of his advice, Mr. Buzzard pressed the old woman to take some refreshment. He cut her a slice of an enormous savoury pie, which had formed part of the bridal repast, and insisted on her drinking his daughter's health ere she departed. Mattie acceded, though scarcely aware what she tasted, so difficult did she find it to forget her recent troubles. When she left the house, she

determined to call on the Lockwoods; and, with no very complacent feelings, tell them that their interference had given rise to all this mischief.

“Agnes was well inclined to believe all I told her,” muttered she, “if these meddling Lockwoods had never encouraged her to think for herself, I might have had my fowls still.”

Thus lamenting, she arrived at her neighbour's cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood were sitting quietly at tea, little suspecting the charge about to be brought against them. When the matter was fairly explained, Thomas attempted to reason with Mattie, on the folly of her accusation; but he strove in vain. Self-will commonly accompanies ignorance, and there is no saying how long the conference might have lasted, if an unusual bustle near the door, had not interrupted the disputants. Mrs. Lockwood and

Mattie looked out of the window, and beheld a troop of boys, with Charles Morris at their head, in full chase after Mr. Buzzard's dog Sly, which evaded the pursuit with cunning, well deserving the name.

"Oh! Charles, Charles," cried Mattie, angrily, "you have made that dog a perfect plague with your encouragement: it was this morning only that I drove him off our onion-bed."

Just at that moment, an abrupt angle in the road, enabled Charles to catch hold of the dog. He grasped him firmly by the neck, and exclaimed, as distinctly as his exhausted lungs would allow, "Five claws, five claws, grandmother."

Mattie startled at this intelligence; she had often explained to her grandson the distinctive features of the Dorking breed of fowls, among which the presence of five claws on the foot was never omit-

ted. In proof of her good instructions, Charles had been the first to detect in the mouth of Mr. Buzzard's dog, the remnant (for alas ! it was but a remnant) of his grandmother's lost property, which had been actually buried in her own onion-bed. Mattie stood aghast at the sight of the two legs, which Charles, with some difficulty, removed from the mouth of the dog. They were torn and half eaten in some places ; but the five claws were sufficiently entire, to leave no doubt as to whom they belonged.

" You nasty beast," said Mattie, as soon as she could speak, " it is you then that have worried my chickens."

" Not he, mistress," observed a working man, who was a neighbour, " that dog is as quiet as a lamb among poultry. He may be a receiver of stolen goods, but one of more knowledge than he, has been the thief."

Charles now proceeded to vindicate his favourite. "Do you not recollect, grandmother," he said, "I told you yesterday, that Sly had buried something in our onion bed, and I showed you how carefully he was earthing it up with his nose, when we returned to dinner. To-day it seems, he was hungry, and came to scratch it up, and mother bade me take it from him, to break him from burying his meals in our garden. I went out, and the first thing that caught my eyes were the five claws hanging out of his mouth."

"I could give a pretty clear guess which way your chickens are gone now, Mistress," said Atkins, addressing Mattie. "Peter Buzzard had one of the grandest pies for the wedding-dinner, that was ever tasted. It was made of different meats, white and brown, as I heard folks say. Now, did he not get

you away on the evening, when most of your neighbours were absent? Your chickens are gone into his pie, beyond a doubt."

Mattie thought of the rich pie she had tasted that afternoon, and covering her face with her hands, she cried heartily.

"Nay do not take on so," said her daughter-in-law Ellen, who had recently joined the party, "you know I was loth to put off the journey until Saturday, only you would have it so; but now we can't bring back the fowls with fretting, mother, neither shall we get at the exact truth, I fear."

"I wish Sly could speak if it were only to tell who gave him the Dorking's legs," said Charles, stroking the dog sorrowfully.

"If we could only ensure him speaking truth," said Atkins, smiling, "though there is a saying, my lad, for rogues,

which is often verified, ‘ No fox so cunning, but he falls at last into the hands of the furrier.’ ”

Mrs. Lockwood was on the point of speaking kindly to Mattie, when the latter raised her apron to her eyes, and proceeded slowly towards her own house. Ellen seemed to feel her neighbour’s good intentions, for she took leave of Mrs. Lockwood with a friendly nod, observing as she looked after her mother-in-law, “ Poor old woman, it is a sad pity she has always given her mind so much to superstition: thank God I never was superstitious.”

CHAPTER VI.

"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for in those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan."—2 Kings xviii. 4.

"How earnestly should we guard against self-righteousness," said Thomas, on hearing Ellen's concluding words; "our natural hearts are indeed, as the prophet declares them to be,—'deceitful above all things.' " (Jer. xvii. 9.)

"To know ourselves, is an attainment to which we are not easily brought," returned Mrs Lockwood, "we gain it

for the most part, by long experience, sanctified by the enlightening guidance of God's Holy Spirit. I wish Ellen was more humble, still I do not think she is superstitious, do you ? ”

“ Yes,” said Thomas calmly, “ that is, if I rightly understand the meaning of the word. I do not pretend to follow it through all its bearings, for I should stick fast if I were to attempt it, but I take superstition to be mainly false devotion, not merely in regard to the object worshipped, but in placing dependance on unwarrantable rites and ceremonies in religion ; and thus far, I think I could give you a few plain instances.”

“ I should like to hear them,” replied his wife, “ for at present I can only think of two or three kinds.”

“ Tell me yours first,” said Thomas smiling, “ and then I will see if I can add to them.”

“ Well,” resumed his wife, “ I think we shall agree in the superstitions of the heathens; take for instance, as one of the least dreadful, an account I was reading last week of the medicine-man of the North American Indians, who is regarded as the priest, prophet, and doctor of his countrymen. He wears round his neck a magic glass, by which he fancies he can discern future events, and when any one is ill, he rattles near the ear of the invalid, a shell filled with dry beans, in order that the noise may drive away the evil spirit, to whom the sickness is attributed. Nearly akin to that, is the supposed influence of wise men, evil eyes, charms, unlucky days, and so forth; notions which, I am sorry to say, are not yet fairly expelled from the minds of some professing christians.”

“ Poor Mattie Morris!” observed Thomas, “ I fear she is not a solitary

instance of this leaning towards idolatry."

"Then," resumed his wife, "I think there is much superstition mixed up with popery; such as penances, and pilgrimages, for the expiation of sin, and masses offered for the souls of the dead; but now, Thomas, you must take up the subject, for I am fairly come to a stand still."

"I will begin then, with the superstition of the Jews," replied Thomas, "You will remember the brazen serpent, which the Lord provided, as a means of recovery for the wounded Israelites: (Numbers xxi. 6—9.) This memorial of Divine mercy had been preserved through successive generations, until the days of Hezekiah, when we learn that this pious king *removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen*

serpent, that Moses had made.' (2 Kings xviii. 4.) And why? '*for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it.*' This shews that the Israelites honored it with idolatrous regard. They ascribed to it a glory which it did not possess. What was that, but false devotion, or superstition."

"At the end of that verse," observed Mrs. Lockwood, it is said, "the king called it '*Nehushtan*,' what is meant by that word?"

"In the notes which we find in many Bibles, it is said to mean, a piece of brass, and the King by calling it so, seemed to remind the people of their sin, in paying it Divine honor."

"It was indeed an awful abuse of God's mercy," said Mrs. Lockwood.

"Some of the Lord's greatest mercies, were abused to this end," continued her husband, "and it shews us, to what man,

in his fallen state, is prone. The Israelites were privileged in having the law given them from Mount Sinai, but they rested in it for justification, instead of using it as a rule of life. Some again relied for salvation, on the outward form of circumcision, and mark how St. Paul addresses these. ‘*Christ,*’ he said, ‘*is become of no effect unto you :*’ (Gal. v. 4.) Thus spoke the inspired Apostle of circumcision, which corresponds with our Christian and divinely-appointed ordinance of Baptism. Now, are there none in these days, think you, who regard Divine ordinances as ends, rather than means ? ”

“ Oh yes, and I now see why you think Ellen Morris superstitious. She talked very oddly one day, when the Clergyman lent her that good tract on the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to read.”

“ What did she say ? ” said Thomas.

“ She remarked, that she might pass over the first few pages, as being only as an explanation of the text, ‘ *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.*’ (2 Cor. xiii. 5), which could not apply to her, because she had been baptized, and therefore knew she was in the right faith, and added, ‘ that if she were converted, it could only be to wickedness and so forth.’ ”

“ And yet St. Paul addressed these words to professing Christians,” returned Thomas. “ If Ellen would only read her Bible more humbly and attentively, she would better realize the scriptural distinctions between a living and dead faith, and she would thus see the vital importance of self-examination, to every human soul.”

“ I do not think Ellen ever receives the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,” observed Mrs. Lockwood.

“ No, for another superstitious notion, she reserves that for her death-bed, thinking it will then impart to her some extraordinary benefit. Now, is not this a false conceit, and a very presumptuous one ? ”

“ It is, indeed, and seems as if she looked to the ordinance rather than to God in it. For independent of the uncertainty of being able to fulfil her intentions, in her last hours, why should she expect a special blessing on the first fulfilment of a long-neglected duty ? You have enlarged my views on superstition this evening, Thomas, for the few instances brought forward, have convinced me that heathens, Jews, Romanists, and Protestants, have all a tendency to rob God of his glory.”

“ The tendency is in the human heart,” observed her husband.

Here ended the conversation, and we

shall leave our villagers for the present, to follow Agnes in her new career. For the first fortnight, things promised well. She had plenty of employment at home, during the week, and on the Lord's day, she left her infant in charge of her next-door neighbour, while she attended Divine service at Church. Ere long, however, an interruption occurred. During the following week, the child was teething, and when Sunday morning came, it appeared so restless, that Agnes remained at home to watch over it. About noon it waked from a refreshing sleep, and the mother was rejoicing in the rosy bloom which rest had restored to its cheeks, when some one knocked at the house door, she rose with the child in her arms to open it, and was accosted by a delicate, distressed-looking young woman, in working-clothes, who asked if she might come in to mangle. Agnes

looked surprised, and hesitated. Her mangle was a source of honest profit to her during the week, but she had never permitted such occupations to trespass on the sacredness of the sabbath, and she felt startled by the idea. Meanwhile the young woman looked earnestly on the child; and while thus intent, her face became more and more sad, and her eyes filled with tears. Agnes was not slow to discover traces of affliction, more especially when her child seemed an object of interest, and she invited the stranger to come in. The latter then stated that her name was Jane Robson, and that she was a married woman, in great poverty. "Her husband," she said, "was a joiner, and had known happier times, but he had been unfortunate, and was now wandering through the country in search of work, while she was left to do the best she could for their united support."

“ You have no family then,” said Agnes.

“ I had,” said Jane, in a tone of deep feeling, “ we had a dear little girl, with just such rosy cheeks as yours has, but she died six weeks ago.”

On hearing this, Agnes felt doubly disposed to alleviate the poor woman's distress, and she asked her a few more questions relative to her present mode of life. Jane seemed quite willing to speak candidly. She owned that she was in debt, and added, that it was her earnest wish to pay every one their own, though she might work night and day to do so. One debt in particular, pressed sorely on her mind, she said. Agnes asked what that was.

“ A debt to a pawn-broker,” said Jane, sorrowfully. “ When John left me to try for work, we were so pinched, we scarcely knew where to turn for a

penny. I was at that time employed by a sempstress to make a set of fine shirts for a ready-made shop, and I pledged half the number for ten shillings, to help my husband on his journey."

Agnes looked dismayed by this recital, for with all her sympathy for Jane, she felt the want of integrity displayed in this proceeding. "Dear me," she exclaimed, I would have begged my bread sooner than pledge the property of another."

"I did it for my husband," said Jane, with tears in her eyes; "he had known better days, and would starve sooner than beg."

The fear of man evidently prevailed over the fear of God in Jane's mind, but Agnes felt disposed to overlook this, in favour of the poor creature's warm affection for her husband.

"But how," said she, "can you face your employer under these circumstances?"

“ I put her off as well as I can,” replied Jane. “ I carried her part of the work, and I promised to bring her the rest, after a time. I have changed my lodgings too, and moved three miles off, so that she cannot call so conveniently. I am sure I work myself to the bone, to get things straight. I am not so particular with respect to the Lord’s day, as I should be, I fear ; but if it happen that I get a job late in the week, I am forced to carry it on through Sunday. What can I do ?”

In strict justice, Jane should have said, *I force myself* to carry it through Sunday ; but *the god of this world* is said to blind the eyes of those who are destitute of true faith, (2 Cor. iv. 4.) Agnes felt beset with conflicting opinions, and still wavering, she asked Jane, how it happened that she had applied to her, as she had never carried on business on the Lord’s day.

"I knew nothing more of you than that paper told me," answered Jane, pointing to a card on the window, on which was written, "Agnes Morton, laundress, with mangle to let."

Agnes perceived that, in her anxiety about her child, she had omitted to take down her card, as usual, on the Saturday evening, and she felt that she should now doubly disappoint Jane if she refused her request, after all that had passed between them. In this perplexity Agnes did not inquire, what is duty, and what does my God require of me? but rather, what is the easiest path, and what will this stranger think of me? The result is soon told. After a little further hesitation, she put her little one into the cradle, and dressing herself in her working-clothes, she assisted Jane with the mangle during the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."—Luke xvi. 13.

My readers may easily suppose that the acquaintance did not end here. Jane repeated her visits, and in proportion as the intimacy increased, she disclosed many more particulars of her history. Among others, she mentioned that her husband had an uncle living in the south of England, who had partly educated him, and who was well qualified to assist him now, if he only would. She added that he had taken his nephew into business for a while, till a quarrel sepa-

rated them ; and the old gentleman having all the money in his own power, turned her husband and herself out of doors. Agnes thought this very cruel conduct ; but she felt that there might be fault on both sides, and she asked if there were no prospect of the parties being reconciled. Jane cried bitterly, and replied there was not a prospect that she saw. When their relation gave them their discharge, it was accompanied with the desire, that he might never behold them again ; and she believed he would be as good as his word. Agnes inquired the cause of the disagreement, but on this point Jane did not seem disposed to speak so openly.

“ It was money matters,” she answered quickly, with a deep blush on her cheek. Agnes forbore to press the question further, and Jane briefly, but feelingly, reverted to the birth of her child.

“Three months before I was turned out of doors,” she said, “I became a mother, and I indulged hopes that all might be well with us again. I relied on John’s merits as a workman, and at first he was successful. He sought employment on a railroad, and obtained it, and a few months afterwards, he hired himself for higher wages to work at some new buildings, where there was employment enough for a twelvemonth or more. Here, however, fresh misfortunes awaited us. My husband fell ill, and while necessarily off work, an under-workman was raised to supply his place. When John recovered, he wished to resume his situation, but the man was as anxious to retain it, and the master of the works gave him the preference, proposing that my husband should undertake another part of the premises. John thought himself ill-used, and said he would

starve, sooner than set foot on the premises again. Thus were my hopes disappointed, as we were cast once more on the wide world."

"But what a pity to throw away his living for such a trifle," said Agnes.

"So I felt it, when we were compelled to wander again," resumed her companion, mournfully. "We heard that hands were wanted here, and I hoped that better fortune might await us, but we had scarcely been settled a month, when our dear babe sickened and died. This was the heaviest trial of all, and I felt then, as if I had never known real sorrow before." Jane's voice faltered as she spoke, and an interval of some moments occurred, before she was able to resume her narrative. After a deep sigh, she thus proceeded. "Since that time, Agnes, every thing has appeared against us. Employment has been

scarce, and wages low, and my husband from being a gay, light-hearted man, has become so gloomy and unsettled, that I often feel as if I had only myself to depend upon. Once he threatened that he would go to America, but that distressed me so much, that he made me a promise that he would not seek work abroad, if he could get it at home. I then bent all my hopes on the new Railroads, and having filled his purse as well as I could, I persuaded him to set off, and try for employment on some of the fresh lines. I thought change might benefit his spirits too, poor fellow."

"Have you heard lately from him?" said Agnes.

"Oh, yes, he is very thoughtful about writing, but he has not yet found a situation to please him."

All that Agnes gleaned on this head, confirmed her in the idea that John must

be a man of idle, unsatisfactory character, but she pitied and liked Jane, with whom she daily grew more friendly. There were times when she certainly lamented that her companion trespassed so much on the sacredness of the Lord's day; but on these occasions Jane had always some plausible excuse to offer. In the first instance, she wished to clear off her debt, and in the next to have money in hand, to send to her husband. In fact "she did evil that good might come," (Romans iii. 8.) Agnes knew that this was no christian rule, but she found it hard to retract where she had once conceded. She saw that Jane redeemed the shirts and restored them to the proper owner, and she therefore flattered herself that all would be right in the end. Meanwhile, Agnes strove to quiet her own conscience, by punctually attending one of the Church services every Sab-

bath, though the remainder of the day was often spent in employments unbecoming its holy character.

How deeply are they deceived, who imagine that God will accept the service of a divided heart, when his blessed Son has expressly said, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon !*"

One Sunday afternoon, Agnes was surprised by a call from Ellen Morris, who had taken advantage of the long summer days, to pay a friendly visit to her relation. The mangle had been in recent use, and Agnes was just then helping Jane to iron. In the midst of their occupation, neither party had heard the knock at the house-door, and the entrance of her former neighbour acted almost like a thunderstroke on Agnes. She tried to give Ellen a hearty welcome, but in spite of herself, her eye rested on the traces of her sin, and she

felt ready to sink to the ground, with shame and confusion. Not so Jane, who was too much engrossed with her employment to think much of any witness, human or Divine. She merely glanced at the stranger, and proceeded with her work. Ellen seemed amazed at the scene before her, and though she refrained from any open remark, she shewed pretty plainly what passed in her mind. Her manner suddenly became dry and distant, and she drew herself up with a look that seemed to say to her relation, ‘ How low you have fallen ! ’

Agnes longed to explain matters, but she could not say all she wished while Jane was present. She merely observed that she was sorry that Ellen had found her so busy, but she should soon have done, as she had intended going to evening church. Ellen looked as if she did not believe her, and after

resting a very short time, she asked rather abruptly, whether Agnes had any message to send to her former neighbours, as she was returning home. Agnes pressed her to stay, at all events, till she had made tea, but Ellen said that she should be sorry to interrupt her, and after answering a few further inquiries after the Lockwoods and other friends, she left the house. Agnes felt sadly vexed ; she knew that Ellen was given to talebearing, and she pictured to herself the report she would carry home, of her Sunday employment. The Lockwoods too, thought Agnes, will hear of my sin, without knowing the temptation. Alas ! that I had not strength to resist it. On the following day, Agnes learned with feelings of alarm, that an infectious fever had broken out in the street where she lived, and that a little child of the same age as her own, had been one of its first

victims. Another infant in the same family, soon sickened ; and Agnes feeling more and more fearful for the safety of her little one, began to consider how she could best preserve it from the impending evil. The child could just walk alone, and it occurred to her, that if she could place it out to nurse for a while in the country, the danger she so much dreaded, might be averted. Under other circumstances, she would have asked Ellen Morris to undertake the charge, but when she thought of her late cold looks, she durst not make the request. Mrs. Lockwood had other occupations ; besides, Mattie and Ellen Morris had, in their way, done many friendly offices for Agnes, on the score of relationship, and she knew they would be affronted if in this instance, she applied to any one in their village before them. Who then seemed so desirable as Jane Robson ?

The child would go to her almost as readily as to its mother, and as she lodged three miles off, with a respectable old woman in a single house, near the cross-roads, Agnes thought, there her darling would surely be safe. She imparted the plan to Jane, who agreed to all she wished, and without loss of time, the little girl was consigned to her care. Nothing but the idea of her child's safety, could have induced Agnes to make such a sacrifice; for she felt the separation keenly, and during the first week, scarcely an evening passed, that she did not walk as far as the cross-roads, after her day's work, to satisfy herself that all was going on well. During one of these visits, she looked ill, and felt unusually weary, and it was as much as she could do to reach home with the assistance of Jane. The doctor, who was immediately called in, declared that

she was attacked with the complaint, from which she had been so anxious to preserve her child. She was now lying powerless on a sick bed, in a low fever, and soon became delirious, and unconscious of the presence of those around her.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Be sure your sin will find you out."—Num. xxxii. 23.

EARLY in the month of August, as Thomas Lockwood was reading in an easy chair, at the door of the cottage, the garden gate was hastily opened by Ellen Morris.

"Only think, Mr. Lockwood," exclaimed she, "that good-for nothing woman has carried off Agnes Morton's child. She who took it to nurse I mean; she gave up her lodging above a week since, and no one knows what is become of her."

"Are you quite sure of this," said

Thomas, with the inward impression that gossip's tales often rest on mere reports.

As sure as I speak to you, Mr. Lockwood," replied Ellen, vehemently, "and it was I who discovered it. I have often inquired after Agnes since I heard of her illness; but I never went to see her until yesterday, for fear I should take the fever myself. She has recovered her senses, and talks of her little girl; so, on the score of relationship, I walked as far as the cross-roads to see it. When I asked for the child, the owner of the house seemed surprised, saying, her lodger had left her a week since, having carried the child to its mother, as she understood. I questioned her further, and she said, Jane Robson received a letter from her husband, which made her cry very much, and the next day she gave up her room, saying she wished to join him at Liverpool, as their minds

were made up to go to America. The old woman asked what would become of the child, and the false creature said she was going to take it to its mother, as the woman who waited on Agnes would look after it."

"And has not any one seen Jane Robson since?" demanded Thomas.

"Yes; when she gave up her lodging, she came strait away to the street where Agnes lived, and asked very much after her. She had the little one in her arms then, and said she would not expose it to any danger, by coming into the house. Indeed, Agnes could scarcely speak at that time; the child looked well and thriving; but Jane was as white as a sheet, though she talked as usual, and bid the nurse tell Agnes that she dearly loved her little one, and would take every care of it."

"And was that her last visit?" demanded Thomas.

“ Yes, and she has not been seen in the neighbourhood since that evening.”

“ Surely she may be traced,” said Thomas, earnestly. “ If the woman be really missing, the facts should be told to a magistrate, though I can hardly imagine she would carry the child to America.”

“ Ah! Mr. Lockwood, you sit in your chair from morning till night, and so know little of the wicked ways of such people; but, my judgment seldom deceives me, and my mother knows that the first day I saw Jane, I came home and said that Agnes had made a very bad acquaintance.”

It scarcely need be observed, that, in reality, Thomas possessed twice the judgment of Ellen, but he was too good-tempered to question the point of her superiority, and fully convinced of her rightful claim to extraordinary penetration,

she left him to tell her tale in other quarters.—Mrs. Lockwood listened with grief to the statement, which her husband shortly afterwards repeated to her; and, with the energy of real benevolence, she set out early the next morning to ascertain the truth of Ellen's story.

On this occasion it proved to be correct. Jane had really absconded with the child, and up to that moment, all efforts to trace them had been fruitless. A fortnight passed away, and in that interval, it was discovered that a woman and child, answering the description of the parties, had been seen a few miles distant, on the morning following Jane's last visit to Agnes; thence they were traced as coach-passengers, some three or four stages, beyond which, no information could be obtained. The feelings of poor Agnes, when she was made acquainted with her loss, can be better

imagined than described. Since the death of her husband, this child had been almost every thing to her. It was her besetting sin to look for all her comfort and happiness in worldly things. She had stayed herself upon her husband, then upon her child, and she had trusted in her friend as a resource in adversity. Now all had failed her; but however wounded beyond the reach of human sympathy, Agnes had a comforter of whom she, as yet, knew little. "*One mighty to save; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,*" (Heb. xiii. 8.) "*a very present help in trouble.*" (Psalm xlv. 1.) Agnes passed many bitter days, before she could look upwards to seek the aid of the Physician of souls, and she was ready to sink under the burden of self-reproach and despair. Many kindly-disposed persons visited her in her hour of need, but her truest comforters felt their own insufficiency, and

earnestly prayed that she might feel the necessity of living more simply by faith on Christ, and of seeking out of his fullness that grace and strength which can alone afford effectual support through trial. Agnes herself began to be more really affected with these truths, and humbly prayed for the teaching of God's Holy Spirit. In the exercise of prayer, her faith strengthened, and she gradually realized a sense of God's Providence, which tended greatly to compose her mind. Her bodily health was, however, much shattered, and she found it desirable to let her mangle for a few months, to a person more able to undertake the laborious duties of the laundry. In the mean time, old Mattie Morris, who had become bedridden, in consequence of a recent attack of paralysis, was glad to have Agnes to attend to her wants.

Ellen's feelings of indignation against

Agnes, had yielded to the better feeling of sympathy in her affliction, and she had warmly entreated her on the present occasion to visit her native village.

“ Stay with us, at all events, over harvest-time, Agnes,” said she, “ fresh country air will strengthen you ; and, when I go out to work, I shall feel so much more satisfied to leave my mother with you, than with a stranger.”

Poor old Mattie was in a pitiable state of body and mind. While in health, her spirits had been supported by the continued excitement in which she lived, rambling from house to house, and collecting all the news and gossip of the neighbourhood. But she was now without resource, fretful and repining. Utterly ignorant of spiritual things, her mind continually recurred to the worldly pleasures of which she was deprived ; and her most welcome visitors were her

old companions, the foolish talkers, and retailers of the scandal of the neighbourhood.

This was very discouraging to Agnes, who was now sincerely desirous to pursue a very different life. She had ascertained from experience, the vanity of depending on any thing short of God, and she trembled to see an aged person so devoted to a world which she must soon leave. On this point she had hoped that she and Ellen would agree; but she found herself mistaken. Ellen was very attentive in administering to her mother-in-law's bodily wants; but, of the necessities of the soul, she seemed altogether forgetful; and when Agnes adverted to the subject, she merely answered, that it was indeed a pity, that Mattie did not give her mind to better things, but she never had, poor woman, and you could not expect to change her views in her old

age. Here lay the root of the greater part of Ellen's errors. Trusting in *herself* that she was righteous, she lost sight of the source, whence all good must be derived; hence, the very gifts of God, became occasions of pride, which she indulged to the neglect of his honour, and of the eternal welfare of those around her. One evening when Mattie was especially low-spirited, and complaining, Agnes offered to read to her; and, having fetched her Bible, she selected such portions of the sacred volume as she had found most comforting during her recent trial. At first, Mattie lay still, and Agnes flattered herself that she was listening; but, in a very short time, the old woman began to fidget and wonder aloud, what kept the folks so late in the harvest-field, and a few moment after, leisurely composed herself to sleep. Agnes closed the book with sorrowful

feelings, and proceeded quietly up stairs, where she was within call, if wanted. In less than a quarter of an hour, she heard Ellen burst into the room below, with intelligence which at once seemed to revive all Mattie's attention. Agnes could not distinguish the subject of Ellen's eager detail; but, presently, she heard the old woman say, "This is news to be sure!—whoever would have thought it! Where is Agnes? bid her come down directly, and then let us hear all about it."

A sudden idea flashed on the mind of Agnes, that some tidings had been heard of her child, and she was down stairs in a moment, exclaiming, "What is it? do tell me."

"You remember Mr. Buzzard of the cross-roads, don't you?" said Mattie.

"Oh yes," replied Agnes, with a feeling of misgiving.

“And do you not recollect hearing of some plate and other articles, that were carried off from a squire’s house on the moor edge, during the absence of the family?”

“I remember hearing something about it,” said Agnes.

“Well, then,” resumed Ellen, “it is now certain that Mr. Buzzard has been connected with the transaction, and it is curious to find how the truth was discovered: you know the youngest child, Kitty, a wild conceited little thing as ever was. The ladies and she have had many a struggle at the Sunday school, and I have often wondered at their forbearance in not turning her out. Sometimes she absented herself for weeks together, until she had a new ribbon, or a new frock, and then she came pretty regularly a few times, as if it were to show it. Last Sunday she was

strutting about, as proudly as a little peacock, looking frequently at her hand as if there was something there she wished every one to admire. Her teacher found fault with her for careless reading, and no wonder, for Kitty's eyes were turned from her book to her glove, in which she had cut a slit to shew a brilliant ring she was wearing on her finger. She was reprov'd for exhibiting such finery, and desired to take it off: the lady believing it to be nothing more than a piece of coloured glass, she had bought at a fair. But no such thing. It was a real gold ring, with a precious stone, called a sapphire in the middle, worth more than Miss Kitty Buzzard could reckon."

"Now what do you think of that?" said Mattie, raising her head from the pillow, with a look of deep interest.

"Stolen goods," replied Agnes, sorrowfully.

“ Stolen indeed,” resumed Ellen, “ they say the lady looked so surprised when she saw the value of the ring, that she turned it round, and held it towards the light, as if she mistrusted her own eyes. She then asked Kitty where she got it, and the child replied, from her mother. This sounded very suspicious, and the lady shewed the ring forthwith to her father, who is a magistrate, and he soon sifted the matter. It seems that a drawer which Mrs. Buzzard commonly kept locked, had been left partially open for a few minutes last Sunday morning. Little Kitty peeped in during her mother’s absence, and seeing the ring, she put it on her finger without telling any one, and dearly loving a little display, she marched off to school with it. Her mother locked the drawer without perceiving her loss, and she was thunderstruck at finding her

own dishonesty detected through the dishonesty of her child."

"But has any one owned the ring," said Mattie, "I want to know how these Buzzards got hold of it."

"The man and his wife told very contrary stories, I fancy," said Ellen, "but the magistrates had the premises searched, and many little things were found secreted which have since been identified as stolen property. The sapphire ring belonged to the Squire's lady, whose house was robbed."

"Well, this is strange," said Mattie, "who would have thought it?"

"Why mother," said Ellen, "you know I never had that confidence in Mr. Buzzard, that you had. I suspected the family were no better than they should be, when your Dorking fowls disappeared so mysteriously."

Mattie looked vexed, and was going

to reply, when her daughter-in-law changed the course of her ideas, by relating some fresh tale, and they conversed on these subjects for the next two hours, during which period, Mattie never complained of weariness. Agnes had returned to her employment up stairs, but as she listened to the merry voices below, she thought within herself, "Mattie does not complain of weariness now, though she composed herself to sleep, when the Gospel was read. Perhaps the gracious promises of Christ's pardoning mercy may not fall much longer on her ears, '*and what will she do in the end thereof*'?" (Jer. v. 31.)

CHAPTER IX.

"Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my Priest."—
Judges xvii. 13.

THE foundation on which Ellen Morris built her religion, was a sandy one, (Matthew vii. 26.) She professed Christianity; but she served Christ after her own fashion, and priding herself on her baptismal privileges, and the fulfilment of certain formal acts of religious worship, she did not scruple to set aside the word of God, when it suited her to do so. A new minister had lately

been appointed to the parish. He was a man of piety and well-regulated zeal, and Ellen was extremely desirous to impress him with a high sense of her attachment to the Church. In the course of his pastoral visits, she often alluded to the contributions she had gathered, in aid of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and seldom forgot to add, that the late Rector always looked to her to lead the church-singers, as she never left her place of worship to try others. Ellen really possessed a fine voice, with a correct knowledge of time and tune, which made her services useful in the village choir. Of this she was quite aware, and inwardly offered incense to her own vanity, under the shew of singing the praise of God. All went on smoothly until harvest-time, when Mr. Selwin was grieved to see the number of his congregation so suddenly dimin-

ished. The absentees all pleaded harvest as their excuse. Some confessed that at this season, they commonly reserved their baking or cleaning for the Lord's day, that they might work later in the fields during the week. Others admitted, that they indulged themselves with an extra portion of sleep on Sunday, after the unusual fatigues of the week. Ellen Morris for one, maintained, that it was her custom to take a holiday in harvest time, and if any one had a right to do so it was she ; since she counted herself one of the best church-goers in the parish. Mr. Selwin feared from the tenor of this speech, that Ellen regarded attendance at Church, as a merit rather than a privilege ; and he asked her, what kind of holiday she thought she had a right to take.

“ I think, I have a right to please

myself, Sir, at such times," replied Ellen sullenly.

"And what, if your pleasure should stand in competition with the word of God?" said Mr. Selwin.

"I think if I do my duty during the rest of the year, I may have a month or six weeks exemption, for works of necessity," returned Ellen.

"Works of necessity, as well as those of mercy and charity, are permitted on the Lord's day," said Mr. Selwin, "but we should be careful not to deceive ourselves in what we call necessity. In the present instance, are you not needlessly pushing your week-day labours to an extent, which forces you to trespass on the sacredness of the Sabbath?"

"Not according to my judgment, Sir," replied Ellen with an impatient toss of her head.

"I would advise you to seek higher

counsel than your own," said the minister calmly, " Pray humbly for the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, to guide you into a right judgment in all things."

" But, Sir," said Mary Atkins, who had herself been a defaulter, " Is it not proper to make the most of such a season as harvest ? "

" I would wish you to make the most of it," said Mr. Selwin, and I will tell you how. Look from the harvest, to the Lord of the harvest. You will not labour less diligently, under the impression that you are reaping the gifts of a Divine Master; but you will then time your work, so as not to let that tempting idol mammon take possession of your heart in opposition to his holy will."

" I understand you, Sir," said Mary, " and I am ready to agree that we think more of mammon than of God, when we

make the Lord's day a time for worldly labour."

"Remember that God will not accept the service of a divided heart," said Mr. Selwin.

"Some folks argued that they did not labour so much as sleep, last Sunday," resumed Mary, "but I doubt that makes little difference, Sir."

"You are right there," said Mr. Selwin, "the rest of the Christian Sabbath is mostly a Christian rest,—a rest for the soul in God. It is a day to be specially devoted to improvement in Divine knowledge, and abstraction from worldly cares. Bodily refreshment must of course be attended to; but I think it wrong to task our strength to such an extent during the week, that we must needs doze away the Sabbath to recruit ourselves."

"You have our true interest at heart,

"I believe, Sir," said Mary, "and I hope I shall spend the next Lord's day better than I did the last; I will make my children ready for the Sunday school too."

"Do," replied Mr. Selwin, kindly, "at this busy time of year, I do not expect they should come prepared with the tasks usually committed to memory during the week; but I would not, on that account, neglect the assembling ourselves together for spiritual instruction and prayer."

Mary was as good as her word, and many of her neighbours, feeling impressed with the truth of their minister's remarks, were induced to take the same course. Ellen, however, stood aloof; her pride would not allow her to break through any customary practice, or indulgence, and she declared that, neither she nor her son Charles, should give way by appearing

at Church on the following Sunday. Ellen flattered herself that her services were too valuable to the singers to be easily dispensed with ; but she was mistaken. On the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Selwin directed one of the Sunday-school teachers to lead the choir, and all proceeded smoothly and devotionally.

Ellen's vexation was extreme, when she found that she had punished no one but herself ; and the more so, as the unoffending person whom she sought to annoy, had uniformly conducted himself with Christian temper and calmness. Pride and passion did their work on her heart, and she declared, " that if she were supplanted in one way, she would have her revenge in another. Mr. Selwin should have no more missionary pence from her indeed ; not he."

" Oh ! Ellen," said Agnes, " you would not make the cause of Christ and

his Gospel suffer, because some one was found competent to fulfil your duties in your absence; you should not take that as an affront."

"I say this," said Ellen, with increased irritation, "I will send in my Missionary box this very night, and I will neither sing, nor attend Church, until I please; and what is more, Cousin Agnes, as you are staying with us, I shall think you very ungrateful if you act any way differently."

Agnes was silent, but Ellen perceived, by the rising colour in her cheeks, that she was inwardly affected. There are few charges more trying to a feeling heart than that of ingratitude; and, for a few moments, Agnes felt ready to make any sacrifice sooner than incur it. But she had learned, from experience, not to yield to first impulses, nor to be guided too hastily by the opinions and

wishes of others. A little reflection led her, by the grace of God, to right views, and their influence on her heart was like that which enabled the faithful Nehemiah to say, '*So did not I, because of the fear of God.*' (Neh. v. 15.) The more Agnes reflected on Ellen's behaviour, the more she felt its sinfulness; but she let the matter rest for a while, in the hope that time would call forth better feelings. The following Sunday, however, brought matters to a crisis. Having mildly expressed a wish to attend morning service, as she had done hitherto, for Mattie had always some one to sit with her during these intervals; Ellen coloured angrily, and replied that, "Agnes might do as she pleased, but if she choose to turn against those whose bread she ate, she had better leave the house altogether."

In vain poor Agnes protested that she

would do any thing, consistent with her duty to God, to serve her. Nothing short of an act of homage to her vanity would satisfy Ellen. Where now was the reality of her profession of zeal for God's service, when she practically exalted *herself* above him? Agnes was painfully agitated by conflicting feelings, and longed to suspend her decision till she could take advice from the Lockwoods; but she felt reluctant to involve them in a quarrel with Ellen, especially when her path of duty seemed so clear. After short, but prayerful deliberation, she calmly asked Mattie if she could spare her to attend morning-service; and, on receiving the old woman's assent, she repaired as usual to the house of God. On her return, she was bitterly upbraided by Ellen, who accused her of insolence and ingratitude, while she added that, as Agnes thought proper to differ from her,

she might leave the house on the following morning. Agnes felt sorely tried in a temporal, as well as spiritual view. This sudden notice to quit threw her out of a home ; for, with Ellen's sanction, she had recently let her own house for a longer period, and she was also much hurt at the way in which she was dismissed. She began an appeal to Mattie ; but the old woman was too much taken up with some new tale to listen to her, and Ellen, as if to check all interference, observed, that, "as she paid her mother-in-law's house-rent, she had a [right to order things at home."

Agnes silently withdrew to her chamber, and after earnestly praying for Divine strength and counsel, she betook herself to her Bible, and sought and found comfort in its precious promises. She soon became more composed, and desirous of fulfilling her duty under all

circumstances. She came down stairs from time to time, to see if she could be of any assistance to the invalid. Mattie, however, wanted nothing. She talked and talked till she was weary; and, when she was refreshed with sleep, (God's merciful restorer,) she woke to spend her renewed strength in the same unprofitable manner. Ellen looked out of humour; and, as the people were going to Church, she stood purposely at her door, in working attire, to shew that she did not belong to them. Her son Charles had remained at home all morning by her express desire; so, to compensate for this wearisome confinement, she let him out when evening service was nearly over, with the free permission to be as wild as he liked for the remainder of the day. Away bounded Charles, exulting in his freedom, and ripe for mischief; he first repaired to the fields adjoining the

Church, and there crouched behind a hedge, to startle the school-children, on their return from worship. The congregation, however, were late ; and the mischievous lad, growing tired of his quarters, began to tie knots of grass across the path, in order to catch the feet of the passengers. While thus engaged, the Church folks began to disperse, and away ran Charles to his hiding-place. But, just as he was prepared to make a sudden sally among the children, he was himself startled by a shriek, uttered by the Sexton's wife, a feeble old woman, who was lying on the ground moaning pitiously. The culprit having betrayed his concealment by the sudden impulse to discover what had happened, was presently dragged forth by the husband of the poor sufferer.

“ So it is you who have twisted the grass in that mischievous fashion,” said

the man angrily, "I'll make you pay for your traps;" and, seizing a stick, he gave the boy a sharp chastisement. Meanwhile the poor woman was conveyed home, where, on examination, it was ascertained that her leg was broken. Ellen Morris was much shocked when she heard of the accident, and began to scold her son, but was interrupted by the Sexton observing, "You are more to blame than he, mistress; had you sent him to learn his duty, instead of confining him, and then permitting him to abuse the Lord's day, it is probable he would have been better employed."

Ellen endeavoured to retort, but feeling she had the worst side of the argument, she muttered an ungracious offer to pay the doctor's expences, and retreated to her own house. This incident did not tend to heal the troubles of the morning, Charles took refuge in an

obscure corner of the house to escape reproach. Ellen's ill humour increased, because she was too proud to acknowledge her sin, and old Mattie, distressed with superstitious fears, began to wonder what new misery would happen, because she had once heard a *wise* man say that, 'misfortunes never came single.'

On the following morning, Agnes acted on the warning of the previous day, and prepared every thing for her departure. Ellen coolly intimated her intention to remain that day at home; and Agnes, perceiving that her services were no longer needed, bade the inmates of the cottage "farewell."

Having to pass the Sexton's house in her way to Mrs. Lockwood's, she stepped in to inquire after Mary Randall, the poor woman with the broken leg. The invalid was going on favourably, and seemed pleased with her visitor's sym-
pa-

thy. Mary was a pious woman, and Agnes felt cheered, and profited by the tone of her conversation. Speaking of her accident, Mary remarked that God often caused good to come out of apparent evil, and she added, "If this suffering of mine leads Ellen and her son to mourn over their misspent Sabbaths, it will indeed be well."

"I never thought that Ellen would have persisted so long in the violation of a well-known duty," said Agnes; "a very short time since, she was saying that she trusted all would go well with her in this world and the next."

"So thought Micah, when he had engaged a Levite to minister before his idols," said Mary, (Judges xvii. 13;) "but mark the issue of his false confidence.—Could his idols help him in time of trial, or did the Lord interpose for his support? No: in the bitterness of his

soul, he was left to cry, ‘ *Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the Priest, and ye are gone away, and what have I more?*’ (Judges xviii. 24.) Thus will it be in all ages with those who presume to substitute a system of their own in the place of that which the Lord has revealed, and Alas! for those of whom Isaiah said, ‘ *Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*’ (Isaiah l. 11.

CHAPTER X.

"For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."—1 Timothy vi. 10.

In the progress of conversation, Mary observed that one thing rather weighed on her mind. A lady, in whose service she had formerly lived, had promised to lodge at her cottage for the next few weeks, for the benefit of country air, and arrangements were made for her arrival on the following day.

"There is no struggling against acci-

dents," resumed Mary, "but I own I could not help fretting this morning when I felt that my hope of waiting again on my dear old mistress was at an end. I must have some one now to do my work, and I scarcely know where to turn for proper assistance."

"Would you think me competent to assist you?" said Agnes, timidly.

"Are you at liberty?" said Mary, with surprise, "I thought you were attending on Mattie Morris."

Agnes related the circumstances which had occasioned her dismissal. On hearing which, Mary said she would gladly avail herself of her services, and they parted soon after with that agreement. Agnes now bent her steps towards Lockwood's cottage, where finding her friends by themselves, she gave a faithful detail of the events of the past week.

“ I did not feel justified in mentioning this before,” she said, for fear of bringing you into a quarrel with Ellen, but now I may relieve my mind, and I cannot tell you how keenly I still feel Ellen’s charge of ingratitude. We little know the trials we may meet with,” she added, with tears in her eyes.

“ True, and we must be prepared to meet them,” said Thomas. “ We are reminded in the public prayers every Lord’s day, that we belong to the Church *Militant*, that is,—engaged in warfare, and how shall it be otherwise, when on our admission into the Christian Church, we are enlisted to ‘ fight manfully under the banner of Christ, against sin, the world and the Devil.’ ”

“ My heart often faints in the contest,” said Agnes, mournfully.

“ That is a natural feeling, if we look

within ourselves," said Thomas, "but sanctified trials lead us to a higher source. When David's heart was overwhelmed, his cry was, '*Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,*' (Psalm lxi. 2.) and he was enabled to testify, with the people of God, that the Lord '*was a shelter and a strong tower from the enemy.*' In another Psalm, he says, '*The Lord God is a sun and a shield.*' (Psalm lxxxiv. 11) Could any one have devised more appropriate emblems of his cheering influence and protection?"

With such truths the Lockwoods endeavoured to raise the drooping spirits of their neighbour, and their efforts were successful. On the following morning, Agnes entered upon her engagement with Mary Randall, with whom she soon became a great favourite. Closer communion with God had produced its proper fruits on the character of Agnes

Morton. She was naturally tender-hearted and obliging, but Christian principle now gave a right impulse to these kindly feelings. After a few weeks interval, Mary was sufficiently recovered to resume her household duties, and Agnes returned at that time to her own house, to carry on her former business.

Early in the following summer, as she was one day engaged in her laundry, she was startled by a summons from a little girl, who came to say, that a gentleman waiting at the door, wished to speak to her. Any sudden emotion recalled to her mind the image of her lost child, and with a look of sadness, yet not without excited feeling, she opened the door.

“Are you the widow named Agnes Morton?” demanded a respectably-dressed elderly stranger, “and have you any family?”

“ I am Agnes Morton,” replied she becoming very pale, “ and I had—Oh ! tell me if you know any thing of my child.”

“ Your child lives,” said the stranger, but seeing the poor woman overcome by her feelings, he supported her into the house, and when his humane attention had composed her agitated spirits, he proceeded to say, that he was a commercial traveller, in the employment of a friend of Mr. Crofts, John Robson’s uncle. The old man, he said, was reconciled to his nephew, about that time twelvemonth, at which period John and Jane, with the child, which they passed off as their own, were received into his house. Not many weeks afterwards John died suddenly from the rupture of a bloodvessel ; and his widow, at the present period, is not likely to survive many days. “ Poor young creature,” he

added, "sin and its consequences have done their work with her. She raised her husband from the depths of poverty to a state of comparative wealth ; but what did it profit ? Death suddenly overtook him in his career of unrepented sin, while she lingers to acknowledge the truth of the text, '*What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?*' " (Matt. xvi. 26).

" They never went to America then," said Agnes, eagerly.

" Not they. John threatened he would enlist as a soldier, but I believe he only said so to induce his wife to raise him money."

" Ah ! it was surely that which affected her so deeply in the last letter she received from him," said Agnes, suddenly recollecting all the little particulars she had learned of that eventful period.

“ Very likely; when she left this neighbourhood, she went straight away to her uncle’s, beyond London, and prevailed on him to give her husband another trial.

“ The sight of the child would be enough to melt his heart,” said Agnes, with emotion.

“ It had its influence, I believe,” replied the man, “ I have heard Mr. Crofts say, that he could not bring himself to punish a woman with an infant, for her husband’s fault.”

“ How had John incurred his uncle’s displeasure? ” said Agnes, “ for that I was never able to learn.”

“ Oh! he behaved most dishonestly. He got into debt, and took up money in his uncle’s name to clear himself; so you cannot be surprised that he was left to provide for himself,” returned her informant. “ However, as I told you,

the old gentleman relented out of pity for the wife and child, and they came together again, though death soon severed them."

"How did Jane bear her loss?" asked Agnes,

"Oh! she was like one distracted when her husband died. She never looked up afterwards. Her health declined, and she grew more and more dejected, notwithstanding the continued kindness of her uncle. Last month, she expressed an anxious desire to converse with a clergyman, and Mr. Crofts fetched the minister of the parish, who has visited her almost daily since that period. One morning, when he was praying with her, she burst into an agony of grief, and besought him to hear her disclosure of a sin which pressed heavily on her mind. She then told him how she had taken away your child, and passed it off

as her own, to promote her husband's worldly prospects. 'The consciousness of her sin,' she said, 'haunted her night and day, but she hoped he would keep it secret till she was gone, as she could never face you again in the flesh.' "

"May the Lord spare her to receive my forgiveness," said Agnes, warmly, "and may he direct her even in this eleventh hour, to flee to Christ the only *fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.*" (Zech. xiii. 1.)

"You speak in a Christian spirit," said the kind stranger; "the minister earnestly exhorted her to prove the sincerity of her repentance, by making an open confession, and immediate restitution of the child, to which she at length yielded. Her first step was to call her uncle to her bed-side, and to tell him how he had been deceived, and she now prays that God will spare her

life, until she can place your child in your arms."

Agnes at that moment was too much affected to reply, but after a short interval, she was beginning to make inquiries regarding the journey before her, when the traveller informed her, that she might spare herself all anxiety on that score, for Mr. Crofts had directed him to accompany her, and he was to pay all travelling expenses. With a heart overflowing with gratitude to God, Agnes, as may be supposed, was quick in her preparations, and ere another day had elapsed, she approached the spot in which all her feelings were centered. Often did her impatience lead her to conclude she must be at the end of her journey, and she feared at last to put the oft-repeated question to her companion. Soon, however, they were brought within sight of a small town,

where the driver presently stopped. "You are fairly arrived now," said the man, "and see, here is Mr. Crofts come to meet you."

A venerable-looking old man approached, and bade Agnes welcome, but she heard him not; her attention was riveted by a child, that clung playfully round its aged protector, while it raised its blue eyes, with eager curiosity to gaze on the carriage. It was indeed, her own lost child: for grown and altered as it was, a twelvemonth could not efface the features impressed on a mother's memory. She unconsciously uttered a scream of joy, and clasped the little one in her arms, striving by many endearing expressions to win a return of affection. When the first feelings of rapture were subsided, Agnes gratefully thanked Mr. Crofts for his kind consideration, and in a voice, still tremulous

with agitation, she then inquired for Jane.

“ She is yet alive,” replied Mr. Crofts, “ spared, I hope, through God’s gracious mercy, in order that she may find eternal rest for her penitent and weary soul. Come this way ; she is prepared to see you, and the sooner you have the first meeting over, the better.”

Agnes followed, inwardly praying for strength and calmness to meet the next trying scene. Her impressions of Jane were so associated with poverty, that in the comfortable, well-furnished room where she was first conducted, she little expected to see her. In a moment, however, her eye rested on the careworn death-like person of her former friend. The poor sufferer heard the footstep, but durst not raise her eyes to meet those of Agnes ; shame and self-reproach completely overpowered her, and covering her

face with her wasted hands, she wept bitterly. Agnes hastened with more self-possession than could have been expected, to the relief of the unhappy woman ; exerting herself to assure her of her forgiveness, and pointing in a tender manner to the only true source of consolation and peace. Jane pressed her hand, and looked her grateful thanks, but was too exhausted to say much at that moment. Indeed it was found necessary that Agnes should leave her for a time. In the course of the evening, she rallied, and Agnes was permitted to pay her a longer visit. The poor woman could not rest until she had made a full confession, and she immediately entered upon the subject.

“ You must not imagine, Agnes, that in the days of our first intercourse, I had a thought of robbing you of your child ; I did feel your kindness, but after I lost my infant, my heart became bound to one

earthly object, and that was my husband. You know how I worked early and late to serve him : how I trespassed on the sacredness of the Lord's day : and on one occasion, went so far, as to raise money on other people's goods to meet John's necessities. While you were lying ill, he sent me word that he was nearly out of money ; that rail-road work was too hard for him, and that if an opportunity offered, he would rather enlist as a soldier, and risk his life abroad, than live from hand to mouth in England. I felt so frightened, when I read this, that I was nearly at my wit's end. Instead of praying to God to deliver me out of trouble, I trusted, alas ! in my own strength, and began to think of various schemes. The thought struck me, that if John and his uncle were only reconciled, we might again live prosperously ; and I knew nothing so likely to

turn away the anger of Mr. Crofts, as to find that a tender infant was on the point of sharing the starvation of its parents. When we left his roof, our little one was only three months old, and he had not been apprised of its death. I never told you, Agnes, why we were turned adrift; but you shall know the whole truth now."

At this period, Agnes gently interrupted her, saying that she had been informed of it, and therefore felt unwilling that she should enter into that detail in her present weak state.

Jane thanked her, and after a short pause, continued as follows :

" When Satan has once led us astray, he will try to keep possession of us, by seducing us further and further from the right way. I told my landlady that we were going to America ; but that was only a lie, invented to deceive her and

others. Bad as I was, I could not set off without asking after you : but you were then almost insensible, and my heart misgave me, when the women about you admired the child, and I promised to do well by it. I made my way here, and gained my end ; but at what a cost ! Mr. Crofts kindly said, he would give my husband another trial for the sake of his wife and child, and we were to live again under his roof under certain restrictions. John seemed anxious to win his uncle's favour : but alas ! it was for the sake of his money, and although our outward circumstances seemed fair, there was no peace within. My husband sometimes feared detection, and blamed me for bringing him into a snare, and oh ! how bitterly did I then feel that I *'had sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.'* (Job xxxiii. 27.)

“ You know that poor John was not

spared long after that. His end was awfully sudden. He appeared very weary one evening, on his return from a cricket-match, and that night he broke a blood vessel, and never spoke afterwards. Oh ! what would I have given to recal the past. I am still spared to cry, ‘ Lord, have mercy upon me ; ’ but he was cut off in the midst of unrepented sin.”

Here, the poor woman paused, being overcome by the painful recollections of the event she was describing ; while Agnes, who was also much affected, offered a silent prayer, that this warning might be sanctified to herself as well as to the dying sufferer. After a while, Jane resumed her narrative. “ Mr. Crofts behaved like a father to me, after my husband’s death ; but his kindness only made me the more alive to my own ingratitude. Sometimes when he

saw me fret, he would bid me cheer up for the sake of my child, and often has he purposely brought the little one to me, thinking the sight of it would soothe my grief. I longed many a time to fall on my knees, and tell him how he was deceived ; but my corrupt heart failed me, and I fled, again and again, to some vain device for consolation. My bodily strength wasted perceptibly, and at length the Doctors said, they could not hold out any hope of recovery. I had fancied as much myself, but as the prospect of death drew nearer, my pangs of conscience seemed little less than a foretaste of eternal torment. The root of the evil was laid bare, and my heart fainted under the constant conviction, that I had brought this misery upon myself, by sinning with a high hand against the living God. Little did I think that his gracious Spirit was still striving with me, to

awaken me to a just sense of my sins, and to lead me, step by step, to the Saviour, in whose precious blood alone, they can be washed away.

“ I determined to make a full acknowledgment of my guilt. But I still shrunk from making it known to my uncle, and I begged an interview with our good minister Mr. Walton, who frequently prayed with me during my illness. I told him the whole truth, Agnes, and begged that as soon as I was laid in my grave, he would repeat it to my uncle, and have the dear child restored to its rightful parent. This temporary concealment from my uncle, he did not approve, and talked repeatedly with me on the subject. He dealt faithfully and tenderly with me, for he was not one who would speak peace where there could be no peace. As he patiently and perseveringly endeavoured to guide me in the way to

eternal life, and dwelt on the awful state of unconverted sinners, I began to sigh more and more, for my own salvation; and at length by the free grace of God, I was led to see the vanity and deceitfulness of my own heart, and to cast myself alone on my Saviour, trusting not in my own, but in his all-sufficient merits. I had then no desire to oppose the good Clergyman's advice, and confessed my crime to my uncle. It was a sore trial, but he behaved better than I deserved. I trust that God has forgiven me, and I glorify him that he has enabled me to cast my burden at the foot of the cross."

After a brief silence, the poor exhausted woman, laid her hand upon that of Agnes, and said, "Agnes, the physician of souls ordained a solemn feast, as a remembrance of his death and passion, and a means of grace for penitent

believers. Can you so far forget the past, as to meet me at his table in peace and charity ?' "

" From my heart I can," said Agnes, fervently, " What am I myself, but a poor sinner in the sight of God ? "

At this moment Mr. Crofts entered, and a faint blush overspread the countenance of Jane, as she gathered strength to make a similar appeal to him. It was kindly responded to, and tears of gratitude flowed down the cheeks of the invalid, as she exclaimed, " How kind, how good ! ' *It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not consumed.*' (Lam. iii. 22.)

" On the following day, Jane having partaken of the outward signs of the body and blood of her crucified Saviour, remarked to Agnes, " How beautiful are these words ; ' *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither*

with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' (1 Cor. v. 7, 8.)

We must feel really desirous to be cleansed from our corruptions, Agnes, if we would be meet partakers of his holy Sacrament."

The life of Jane was now hastening to its close. Early in the ensuing day she became insensible, and her end seemed at hand ; but she again rallied for a short time, engaged in prayer, and listened to portions of the word of God. A few of her favourite hymns, were also repeated to her, and when Agnes came to the lines,

Return, my wandering heart, return,
And earth's vain shadows chase no more.

she said, " Lord ! be it so ; '*They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy.*' " (Jonah ii. 8.)

Then after a pause, she added

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee !

These were her last words ; she lay perfectly still for a few moments. The hand of Agnes was gently pressed, and Jane was no longer an inhabitant of this world of sin and death.

CHAPTER XI.

"The harvest is past, the summer ended, and we are not saved."—Jer. viii. 20.

WE shall resume our narrative at the close of Summer, when Agnes availed herself of a fine bright afternoon, to visit her native village with her child. August had ushered in a scene of glory and richness. Blossom was giving place to seed, for the valleys stood thick with corn, and the orchards drooped under the profusion of their ruddy fruit, which glowed in the last rays of the setting sun. Agnes was that evening with Mrs. Lock-

wood, and the little girl had fallen asleep on a couch, strewed with bindweed, and mountain ash-berries, which she had playfully endeavoured to twist into a garland.

“How peaceful she looks,” said Agnes; “and oh, how thankful should I be for the restoration of such a treasure. I hope I feel its value now,” she added, thoughtfully.

“Look from the gift to the Giver,” Agnes, said Mrs. Lockwood, “and you will feel an increasing sense of its value.”

“I know what you mean,” said Agnes, “for it was just that which I never felt before; I dearly loved my child, as my pleasure and my comfort in this world; but I never thought of it as a soul to be trained for immortality.”

“Perhaps you never considered the practical application of our Saviour’s word, ‘*Seek first the kingdom of God*

and his righteousness." (Matt. vi. 33.) observed Thomas.

"No, Mr. Lockwood, to my shame I did not; I professed myself a Christian, while my affections were centered on things of this world. Little did I realize the Apostle's spirit, where he says, '*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*'" (Col. iii. 1.)

"That reminds us," said Thomas, "that Christ's resurrection is not only a pledge, that our bodies shall be raised at the day of judgment, but a pattern also of our spiritual resurrection from the love and dominion of sin: as we read in the Epistle to the Romans: '*Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God,*

through Jesus Christ our Lord.' (Romans vi. 9, 11.) Of what avail is Christ's Resurrection to us, if our souls are still bound to the things of earth?"

"I learned many a humbling truth at the death-bed of Jane Robson," observed Agnes. "There the perishing vanities of this world, and the everlasting realities of the next, seemed brought before me in awful contrast, and a warning was breathed as it were from the lips of the dead, to '*set my affections on things above.*'" (Col. iii. 2.)

The tears came into Agnes' eyes as she added, "I trust that Jane became a child of God in her latter days; but I never think of our first intercourse without feelings of self-reproach and sorrow."

"How is that," said Mrs. Lockwood.

"Oh! I think I might at least have set her a better example; ignorant as I was of true religion, I had been better

instructed than herself, and I might have used even the little light that I had for her good. My kind Christian neighbours," continued Agnes, warmly, "how deeply I feel indebted to you for your forbearance with me."

"Our forbearance, Agnes!" said Mrs. Lockwood, "how and when do you mean?"

"Ever since you knew me," replied Agnes, "you saw how weak and worldly-minded I was; but you pointed out my danger so tenderly, that I insensibly came to you for sympathy and counsel. A cold word or desire to stand aloof on your parts would have effectually repulsed me, for indeed, Ellen Morris often gave me to understand that I was not fit to be admitted to social intercourse with her."

"Have you seen Ellen since you came?" said Thomas.

“ Yes, I saw her on my way here, and I spoke ; but she answered very shortly, as if she had no wish to prolong the interview. I asked if I might call on Mattie ; but she replied, there was no occasion, as the poor old woman was so infirm, she did not know one person from another.”

“ That is true,” resumed Mrs. Lockwood, “ Mattie has had another attack of illness, which has brought her mind into a state of second childhood. The little understanding she had is gone, and it is not expected that she will live many days.”

Agnes was silent, and looked grieved. She thought of Mattie’s advanced age, and of the many seasons of grace she had passed, without any apparent concern for the salvation of her soul. At length she said, “ When I came within sight of those corn-fields this afternoon, I was reminded that a twelvemonth had

just passed over, since I was here to assist Ellen. God has indeed set lights in the firmament '*for signs and for seasons,*' (Gen. i. 14,) signs, to warn us that our '*days are as a shadow that passeth away,*' (Psalm cxliv. 4,) and seasons, to mark as it were the progress of time towards eternity. Does Ellen seem to feel her mother-in-law's state?"

"Not as she should, I fear," replied Thomas, "indeed it can scarcely be expected, when she is so blind to her own."

"Pray, tell me," said Agnes, "does Ellen still absent herself from Church?"

"She has never returned since the day that others were found competent to sing the praises of God in her absence. She passed her Sundays at home until the beginning of last summer, when she was induced to sing at the opening of a new Roman Catholic Chapel, where she has since been a regular attendant."

“Is it possible!” said Agnes, with astonishment, “Ellen, who used to talk so violently against the errors of the Romanists?”

“Violence is no proof of steadfastness, Agnes,” said Thomas. “It only marks a spirit directly contrary to that of our Divine Saviour.”

“So I have found it, I am sure,” replied Agnes, “but I mourn over Ellen; she was very headstrong, where her pride was touched; but when she spoke of her attachment to our Church and its privileges, I really believed she was sincere.”

“It is painful to witness such inconsistency,” said Thomas, “a lamentable proof that Gospel privileges unimproved, may even become an occasion of pride and self-righteousness,” and ‘*a haughty spirit goeth, before a fall.*’ (Prov. xvi. 18.)

“Self-glory has been Ellen’s idol,”

said Mrs. Lockwood, sorrowfully, "I fear she has sacrificed her conscience for a vision of earthly vanity.

"I understand you," said Agnes, "and it makes me ashamed to think of the trifling perishable things, which professing Christians often cherish with an adherence, which they do not manifest towards God."

"I have heard it remarked," said Thomas, "that the idols, Baal and Ashtoreth, personified in that day, the pomps and vanities of these times. Though we have not now the Images, we may as sinfully worship the realities."

"And what is become of poor Charles Morris?" said Agnes.

"Charles is going on more hopefully. The poor lad was grieved for the sufferings of Mary Randall, (the victim of his idle sport on the Lord's day) and the lesson sank deep into his heart. From that

time he was foremost in running on her errands, or doing her any service in his power; and Mary's lodger took such a liking to him, that she was the means of getting him very well placed last spring, with a friend, at some distance, who wanted a boy to carry out parcels. Charles's master is a right-minded man, I hear, and the boy has thus far been steady and well conducted."

"May God guide and protect him," poor fellow," said Agnes, "and Oh! that we, professing ourselves servants of Christ, may more and more realise our Divine Master as supreme in our hearts, '*For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.*'" (Psalm xlviii. 14.)

FINIS.



