

No. 36.

THE

VILLAGE FUNERAL.



PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
159 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

PLEA FOR THE TRACT CAUSE,

AT

HOME AND ABROAD.

"No doubt," says one, "Tracts may be exceedingly useful, but to circulate them throughout our country will *cost too much*." How much, then, will it cost? A hundred thousand dollars has been expended in this country upon a single horserace! A million of dollars can be raised in a single city, or town, at almost any time, for a single manufactory! \$7,000,000 can be raised in a single state, for a canal!

"This," says one, "is a great and noble object. It promotes improvements, opens communication, and facilitates intercourse between one part of the country and another." I acknowledge it is a great and a noble object. And is there nothing great, nothing noble in the everlasting improvement of twelve million minds? in showing a path, and facilitating their progress on their way to glory, and onward, from glory to glory, to everlasting ages?

But we must do vastly more than to supply the twelve million of our own country with Tracts. The Canadas, Mexico, and all South America, are calling upon us to help them; five thousand will soon be able to read among our Western Indians; ten thousand at the Sandwich Islands; and ten million can read now, in countries around the Mediterranean. Said a gentleman, who visited those countries, to men who, before he left home, had furnished him with Tracts for distribution, "I thank you, gentlemen, a thousand times for the Tracts. I had been told that it was of no use to think of offering Tracts to Italians, Greeks, Portu-

THE

VILLAGE FUNERAL.

"Funerals in the country are solemnly impressive. The stroke of death makes a wide space in the village circle, and is an awful event in the tranquil uniformity of rural life. The passing-bell tolls its knell in every ear; it steals with its pervading melancholy over every hill and vale, and saddens all the landscape."

DEATH is a solemn subject of meditation; but it is one which presents stronger claims on our attention than any other, because we *must die*. If to die were a mere cessation of being; if, when the mantle of mortality falls, we lay down in the tomb to rise no more; if, when the intellect ceases to think, the passions ceased to glow, the active virtues ceased to display their moral beauty, and the human soul lived only in the recollection of surviving friends; we would forbear to pass a heavy censure on the general indifference which is manifested towards this solemn theme. But has not the Sacred Volume revealed life and immortality? Do we not there read, that "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation?" John 5: 28, 29.

Death spares neither age nor rank, talent nor piety. He, as the king of terrors, sways the sceptre of absolute authority over all the living; none can elude his attack, nor resist his power. What a scene is presented to the fancy, where he has achieved a conquest! The sparkling eye is become dim, the instructive lips are sealed in perpetual silence.

The ear is deaf to the voice of friendship and the song of mirth ; and the tabernacle of bliss is changed into the house of mourning. The preparations which are necessary for the interment, keep the mind in a state of constant agitation ; but when these are all adjusted, and the mournful hour of departure is come, the passions usually burst forth, and proclaim, amidst sobs, and tears, and groans, the sadness of the desolation.

It was on a fine summer evening, as we sat conversing together on the immortality of the soul, and on that state of purity and of blessedness which the righteous will enjoy in the heavenly world, that we received intelligence of the approaching dissolution of Mrs. Allen. Mrs. Stevens expressed a desire to go and see her once more before her decease ; and having accepted my offer to accompany her, the chaise was immediately got ready to convey us to her humble dwelling.

I have often observed, in my intercourse with society, that the benevolent affections are not exclusively cherished by any individual class of its members, but glow in the breasts of all ; yet they are invariably most delicate, when refined by the hallowed fire of devotional sentiment and feeling. On some occasions we see, in the walks of humble life, even where religion has not distilled her sweetest influences, the tributary tear paid to departing worth ; yet in general there is a degree of insensibility which excites astonishment, if not disgust. But as we entered this lonely retreat, we felt conscious that we were in the house of mourning. The husband, who had just returned from his hard day's labor, sat in the window-seat, with his frugal repast at his side, untouched ; his hand, spanning his forehead, concealed his eyes, as his little boy stood near him, pensive and sad. No voice spoke, no noise was heard, nor did our entrance disturb the mourner in his musings of grief. We felt a momentary tremor, under an apprehension that death had come, and borne off his captive. At

length Mrs. Stevens said, "Well, Robert, is your wife still in the body, or in glory?" He started from a deep pensiveness, and as the silent tear fell on his sun-burned face, he replied, "She is still with us; but she will soon be gone. She has been discoursing much about you, ma'am, all day; and it will give her pleasure to see you again before she enters the joy of her Lord."

We walked up stairs, and as we drew near, she expressed great delight at seeing us. She sat up in her bed, being supported by pillows; her face glowed with the hectic flush; her eyes shone with radiant brightness; her voice was clear, though not strong; and her mind soon discovered all its native sprightliness and vigor. "Here I am," she observed, "in the last stage of decline, and I am hourly expecting a change. Disease has nearly consumed my body, before death comes to feed on it; but as my outward man perisheth, blessed be God, my inward man is renewed day by day. I have passed through deep waters since I saw you, but they have not been permitted to overflow me; for, when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him. The contest is nearly over; the prize of my high calling is in view; Jesus the Mediator will soon, very soon, present me faultless before the presence of the Divine glory with exceeding joy. Oh! He is a faithful as well as a merciful High Priest."

"I am happy," replied Mrs. Stevens, "to find you in such a delightful frame. You have borne a living testimony to the truth of religion, and now you can bear a dying testimony to its excellence."

"My living testimony," said she, "has been but feeble; it has not spoke out in such decisive tones as it ought to have done; I dare not think of it, but with regret, with self-loathing. I have been an unprofitable servant, a treacherous disciple, a disobedient child; but I look for redemption, and for acceptance, to Jesus the Mediator, whose blood cleanseth from all sin."

"But it must give you pleasure," Mrs. Stevens remarked, "to look back, and see the fruit of your religious principles, though that fruit may not have been so rich as you could have wished."

"It gives me pleasure," said the dying saint, "to believe that I have been kept from falling, and that I shall soon be permitted to express my ardent gratitude in the immediate presence of my Lord, but I can derive no satisfaction from a review of my own conduct. I am a sinner saved by grace."

"You are now," I observed, "near the end of your course, and I suppose you would not willingly recommence your pilgrimage on earth."

"I would, sir, cheerfully, if my Lord were to command me, but not otherwise. I long to be with him. To give up my dear husband and child occasioned a hard contest; but I have been enabled to do it; I am going home, and my Father is waiting to receive me."

After having committed her departing spirit to the Lord Jesus, and prayed for her husband and her child, who were just on the eve of being deprived of their richest earthly treasure, we left her, and returned to the villa, where the news of her decease reached us within the space of an hour. After we left, she spoke but seldom; she lay with her eyes closed, but from the occasional motion of her lips it was evident that she was much engaged in prayer; at length she said, "I feel a change which I cannot describe—is this death? Oh, how easy! The king of terrors is transformed into an angel of deliverance. I shall soon see the King, the Lord of hosts, in his beauty. I am entering the valley, but there is no darkness. I see the shadow of death, but feel not the sting." After a short pause, during which her spirit seemed to be gathering strength for its final departure, she embraced her husband and her child for the last time; and having solemnly commended them to God, she reclined her head on the pillow, and expired. "Precious in the sight of the Lord

is the death of his saints ;” and their decease is often precious in the sight of men. They are usually composed, and sometimes in raptures ; and such is the effect which their joyful anticipations are known to produce on the minds of spectators, that even those who contemn their religious principles, have retired from their presence, saying, “ Let us die the death of the righteous, and may our last end be like theirs.”

The ancient custom of burying the dead in the evening, is still observed in some parts of the country ; and this custom prevailed in the village of —. I left the villa with Mr. Stevens and Mr. L—— about five o’clock ; and just as we reached the cottage the corpse was brought and placed on two stools, which stood in the centre walk of the garden. It was deposited in a neat oak coffin, which bore the name and the age of the deceased. When the preparations were completed, the procession moved in the following order : A band of singers preceded, then the bearers two and two, carrying the coffin in their hands, one little boy walking on each side with a stool, to afford an occasional resting ; the widowed husband and the surviving youth, attired in black, were the chief mourners ; a few relations and a few poor friends walked behind them ; and many of the inhabitants of the village attended as spectators. As the bier entered the vale which winds round the hill that divides the two parishes, the singers sang the following hymn :

“ Hear what the voice from heaven proclaims
 For all the pious dead ;
 Sweet is the savor of their names,
 And soft their sleeping bed.

They die in Jesus, and are blessed ;
 How kind their slumbers are !
 From suff’rings and from sins released,
 And freed from every snare.

Far from this world of toil and strife,
 They're present with the Lord;
 The labors of their mortal life
 End in a large reward."

The effect was solemn and delightful. Echoes, which had slept for ages, awoke and tuned their responding voices to the melody of death. The bier stood still as soon as the hymn was sung, that the bearers might rest from their labors; when the thrush and the nightingale, roused from their silence by the music of the valley, intermingled their enchanting notes, as though anxious to perpetuate the song. The number of spectators increased as we advanced; all were serious, some wept; and when we turned into the lane which led up to the graveyard, the venerable Mr. Ingleby headed the procession. Another hymn was now sung in accents more bold, but equally melodious with the former.

"O, for an overcoming faith,
 To cheer my dying hours,
 To triumph o'er the monster Death,
 And all his frightful powers!

Joyful, with all the strength I have,
 My quiv'ring lips should sing,
 'Where is thy boasted vict'ry, grave?
 And where the monster's sting?'

If sin be pardoned, I'm secure;
 Death hath no sting beside:
 The law gives sin its damning pow'r;
 But Christ, my Ransom, died.

Now, to the God of victory
 Immortal thanks be paid,
 Who makes us conquerors while we die,
 Through Christ our living Head."

The corpse, when taken into the church, was placed in the middle aisle; and after the appropriate portions of Scrip-

ture were read, it was carried out to the place of sepulture; where, after the burial-service was performed, it was deposited till the morning of the resurrection. When Robert and his little bereaved boy looked down into the grave which had just received the remains of her whom they tenderly loved, they wept; and returned to their house of mourning, dejected, yet animated by a hope of a reunion in the celestial world.

The solemnity of the funeral made a deep impression on my mind. I stole away from the crowd, which was pressing round the grave to take the last look of the coffin, that I might indulge my musings in retirement. Death was the theme of my meditation. Humiliating theme! How calculated to bring down the lofty spirit of pride; to extinguish the flame of ambition; to hush the contentions of discord!

A chilling horror came over my spirit as I anticipated my own decease. The lengthened sickness; the parting tear; the final farewell; the unknown pains of dying; the solemn anticipations of an immediate entrance into another world; the interment of my body in the cold, damp earth; the sighs of my bereaved widow and fatherless children; all rushed in upon my fancy, and produced a deep depression. Never did the communication which the Redeemer once made to the mourner of Bethany appear so beautiful as at this moment: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11: 25, 26. It was the light of life bursting in upon the empire of death, gilding the whole scene with the vision of immortality, and elevating my mind above the desolation around me, to look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

I did not leave the churchyard till the shadows of the

evening reminded me of the lateness of the hour, and also of my having deserted my friends, whom I found waiting for me at the Rectory. When I entered the study, the venerable Pastor said, "I am happy, sir, to see you once more on this side the grave; I shall be more happy to see you on the other side; but before that blest interview can take place, two graves must be opened, and we both must pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. My graveyard is much richer than it was when I commenced my labors in this parish; and in walking round it my mind gets associated with some of my earliest religious friendships. Here, I see the monument of my friend, with whom I took sweet counsel; there, the tombstone of my companion, with whom I walked to the house of God in company; and now I shall have one erected to the memory of her whose remains we have just committed to the earth. Yes, and the day is not far distant when I shall be called to rest from my labors. Ah, soon, in a scene like this, I shall be the principal figure! All these ceremonies will be performed for me. But I have a sublime prospect before me. A prospect, in comparison with which the boldest scenery of nature, the richest decorations of art, the most fascinating attractions of social or domestic bliss, fade away, as the brilliancy of the stars is obscured by the overpowering brightness of the meridian sun."

"It is not every Christian," said Mr. Stevens, "who can speak with the same degree of confidence of future happiness. Some can meet death with rapturous delight; others enjoy a settled composure in their last moments; while in some, hope and fear alternately prevail. And though we may in some instances trace up this varying state of feeling, as death approaches, to physical causes, yet, should we not contemplate, in these cases, the all-wise and benevolent agency of God, who dispenses a larger or smaller portion of consolation, as, in each case, he sees to be best?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the Pastor; "yet the Scriptures

lead us to believe that there is an ordained and a natural connection between an eminently holy life and an eminently peaceful decease. Hence, the apostle, after enforcing on his readers the cultivation of the graces of the Christian character, concludes by saying, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 2 Peter, 1: 10, 11. 'The confidence of the people of God,' says the pious Mr. Jay, 'generally increases as death approaches.' Hence, Isaiah compares their peace to a river; for, as a river rolls deeper and wider as it hastens to the sea, so their peace commonly becomes more solid and more extensive as they draw near eternity. In this view, the change which Dr. Goodwin experienced was remarkable. 'Is this dying?' exclaimed he, a little before he expired: 'Is this what, for so many years, I have been dreading? Oh, how precious does the righteousness of the Saviour now appear! He cannot love me better than he does; and I think I cannot love him better than I do.' This is not a solitary instance. How many have we ourselves seen who wept upon the mountains of Zion, but rejoiced in the valley of the shadow of death; whose harps, long before hung upon the willows, were taken down, and delightfully used in singing the Lord's song in the most strange part of all the strange land! We cannot always account for things as effects, which yet we are compelled by observation and testimony to admit as facts. But the case before us sufficiently explains itself. The love of life having, from the will of God, no longer now any purposes to answer, is suffered to die away. By drawing near the better country, we feel something of its influence, as the perfumes of 'Arabia the Happy' are blown into the neighboring provinces. Above all, there is now more of the simplicity of faith. During life some degree of legality attaches to all our performances. Doing continually intermingles

with believing; and often, insensibly to ourselves, we are anxious to make ourselves better, to *entitle* us to the divine favor, or to find something in ourselves wherein to *hope*, if not whereof to glory before God. But all this is now over. What can the believer do when dying? What qualifications can he then acquire? What attainments can he then propose? 'Let him look back,' says one, 'upon a well-spent life.' This is impossible. Every review which he takes of himself is humbling. The very sins of his holy duties would drive him to despair. One resource remains—one, only one, which is always equal to our relief—one, whose consolation is only hindered from flowing in to us by the want of simplicity of mind: it is, looking, by faith, to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world; it is, to commit implicitly the soul to him. 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.'" Heb. 7: 25.

"I am fond," said Mr. L——, "of visiting the sick and the dying. When with them, I feel the truth of religion. The terror which seizes on the spirits of an infidel in his last moments, and the rapture which glows in the breast of the expiring Christian, equally attest its supreme excellence. I have seen the unbeliever tremble, as the footsteps of death have been heard; his face has turned pale through fear, or it has been shaded by despair. I have heard him utter the most piercing cries; send forth sighs and groans—the speechless messengers of woe; reproach himself in the strongest language for his folly and his guilt, in having passed through life an enemy to the faith of Christ; and I have seen him expire in unutterable anguish. I have also seen the believer calm, elevated, and enraptured. I have heard the music of his soul becoming more soft and enchanting as the vital spirit has languished in his frame. I have listened with pleasure, while he has given utterance to his holy feelings and blissful anticipations; but I have never heard one express any

regret for his attachment to the doctrines of the Gospel. I have never known one willing to renounce his faith, or give up his hope, in prospect of death."

"Nor I," said Mr. Ingleby, "and this circumstance is a strong presumptive evidence in favor of the adaptation of the Gospel to our moral condition. Infidelity may contemn the faith of Christ, and hold up its friends to scorn; but she is faithless; for when her disciples want her presence in their last hours, she generally leaves them as victims whom she has fitted for destruction, that she may return among the gay and the dissipated, to prepare them also for the pangs of the second death."

It was late before we left the Rectory, and in passing by the cottage which had that day cast out its dead, we saw a light in the room, and on knocking at the door, we gained admittance. "Well, Robert," said Mr. Stevens, "you are not yet gone to bed."

"No, sir," he replied; "if I go to bed, I don't think that I shall go to sleep. I thought when my wife lay so ill, and suffered so much, that I should be willing to give her up to the Lord, if he would take her; but now she is gone, I feel my loss. No man can tell what death is, till it comes. I love to think of her, for she was a good wife, and a good mother; and I should like to talk to her; but now, if I go into the room, I find that I am alone; and this chills my heart. My boy tries to comfort me, but, poor fellow, he wants a comforter as well as I; for he loved his mother."

"But God," observed Mr. L——, "can support you under your trial; for he has said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'"

"Oh, yes," replied Robert, "he does support me, and has given me a spirit of resignation to his holy will; but, sir, nature can't help feeling."

"But," said Mr. Stevens, "I do not suppose you would recall her from heaven, even if you were permitted."

“Why, sir, it gives me pleasure to think that, while I am mourning here below, she is enjoying the felicity of the heavenly state; but if I were permitted to recall her, I am sure that I should be tempted to do it; for she always tried to make me happy. But she is gone, never more to return. In looking into her drawer, since we came back from the funeral, I found these papers, which I have just been reading.”

I looked over them, and having transcribed a copy of one, I will insert it. It was dated three months before her decease.

“I have just been favored with a singular manifestation of the loving kindness of my Saviour. He has pardoned all my sins. He has removed all my doubts. He has given me peace, and has enabled me to resign my husband and child to his care. He will soon take me to himself. As I have felt at times great depression, and may in my last moments be unable to speak of his doings, I now record in writing what will not be seen till after I have seen him. I die a guilty and worthless sinner, depending on his death for salvation; and can say, that I die in full and certain hope of a joyful resurrection to eternal life. SARAH.”

“DEAR WIDOWED HUSBAND—Before you see this, I shall have passed through the valley, and joined the redeemed above. While you are weeping, I shall be rejoicing; yet, if the spirits of the glorified are suffered to visit their earthly friends, I will often come and hover over you, and the dear motherless child. Follow me, as far as I followed Christ. Farewell, till we meet in glory.

“Yours for ever,

SARAH.”

guese, and Spaniards; they would not read them. But, gentlemen, I know better. You have no idea how welcome the Tracts were in all the ports at which we touched around the Mediterranean. The people ran after me in the streets, and pulled me into their houses, in order to obtain them; and that too, after I had distributed all that I had. I could hardly pacify them, but by telling them that when I came again I would bring them more." Printing-presses are now in operation in connection with Missionary stations on the Mediterranean. Give them the means, and Tracts, as cheap as they can be furnished in this country, may be printed in Greek, and Italian, and French, and Arabic, and Armenian, and extended to ten million of people, multitudes of whom are almost entirely destitute of the means of grace. \$1,000 may put in circulation one hundred thousand Tracts of ten pages each, or, of four pages, two hundred and fifty thousand, which, if read each by four persons, would speak to one million of people. Here, then, is a way in which men may, from love to Christ and to souls, through the medium of this Society, employ property in a manner, which, while it does not make them poor, will make many rich, and secure an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Thousands and thousands are now perishing for the want of Tracts, on the Island of Ceylon. "We visit," said a missionary, "from two to eight families in a day; sometimes we take long journeys, and are out six or eight days. At such times we take a number of boys from the schools, and we exceedingly need Tracts. As we pass from village to village, where the Gospel was never preached, we find hundreds who can, and would read, had we Bibles or Tracts to give them. But alas! we have none; no Bible, no Tract, to show the poor heathen how to flee from the wrath to come. Oh, that we could get a supply printed. Into how many villages might the Gospel be sent by means of Tracts; and

1451

how many souls, by a single Tract, might be saved from endless misery."

And shall the missionary, who has left his father's house, his native land, and gone thirteen thousand miles to tell the dying pagans of a Saviour, cry in the ears of a thousand churches, abounding with wealth, "Oh, that we could get a supply of Tracts printed. Into how many villages might the Gospel be sent by means of Tracts, and how many souls might be saved by a single Tract from endless misery," and yet cry in vain? Let those churches answer.

Rev. Dr. Edwards's Address, 1826.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Cor. 15: 50-58.