

A Short Story

COTTAGE
Conversation.

**Rev. Legh
Richmond.**



Cottage Conversation.

As I journeyed late on a summer evening, meditating on the beauties of the prospect around me, while they gradually faded from my sight, through the approach of darkness, it grew suddenly quite gloomy, and a black cloud hanging over my head threatened a heavy shower of rain. The big drops began to fall, and an open shed, adjoining to a labourer's cottage, offering me a seasonable shelter, I dismounted from my horse, and found it large enough to protect him as well as myself.

The circumstance reminded me of the happy privilege of the believing sinner, who finds a "refuge from the storm, and the blast of the terrible ones, in the love of his Redeemer," which prepares him "a covert from storm and from rain." I went in unperceived: the door of the cottage was half open, and I heard the voices of a poor man, his wife, and some children within.

I was hesitating whether to go into the house and make myself known, or to enjoy in solitude a meditation on the foregoing comparison, which my situation had brought to my mind, when these words, spoken in a calm and affectionate tone, struck me with mingled pleasure and surprise, and determined me not to interrupt the conversation:

"Indeed, wife, you are in the wrong. Riches would

never make us happier, so long as the Lord sees it good that we should be poor."

"Well," replied the wife, "I can see no harm in wishing for more money and better living than we have at present. Other people have risen in the world; and why should not we? There's neighbour Sharp has done well for his family, and, for anything I can see, will be one of the richest farmers in the parish, if he lives; and everybody knows he was once as poor as we are: while you and I are labouring and toiling from morning to night, and can but just get enough to fill our children's mouths, and keep ourselves coarsely clothed, and hardly that."

"Wife," answered the man, "having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. And if it please God that even these things should fall short, let us submit ourselves to God in patience and well-doing, for he gives us more than we deserve."

"There, now you are got to preaching again," said the woman; "you never give me an answer, but you must always go to your Bible to help you out."

"And where can I go so well?" replied the husband. "Is it not God's own word for our instruction?"

"Well, that may be, but I don't like so much of it," answered she.

"And I do not like so little of it as I see and hear from you," returned the man.

"Why, that book has taught me, that it is an honour and comfort to be a poor man; and, by the blessing of the Spirit of God, I believe and feel it to be true. I have, through mercy, always been enabled to get the bread of honest industry, and so have you; and though

our children feed upon brown bread, and we cannot afford to buy them fine clothes, like some of our vain neighbours, to pamper their pride with ; yet, bless the Lord, they are as healthy and clean as any in the parish. Why then should you complain ? Godliness with contentment is great gain ? ”

“ An honour and a comfort to be a poor man, indeed ! What nonsense you talk ! What sort of honour and comfort can that be ? I am out of patience with you, man,” the wife sharply cried out.

“ I can prove it ! ” replied he.

“ How ? ” returned his partner, in no very pleasant tone of voice.

“ My dear,” said the good man, “ hear me quietly, and I will tell you.”

“ I think it an honour, and I feel it a comfort, to be in that very station of life which my Saviour Jesus Christ was in before me. He did not come into the world as one that was rich and great, but as a poor man, who had not where to lay his head. I feel a blessing in my poverty, because Jesus, like me, was poor. Had I been a rich man, perhaps I should never have known nor loved him. ‘ For not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ’ God’s people are chiefly found among the base things of the world, and things which are despised. This makes my poverty to be my comfort.

“ Besides, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him ? This thought makes my poverty also to be my honour.

“ Moreover, to the poor the gospel was and is preached, and to my heart’s delight I find it to be true, every

Sunday of my life. And is it not plain, all the neighbourhood through, that while so many of our rich farmers, and tradesmen, and squires, are quite careless, or set their faces against the ways of God, and are dead to everything that is gracious and holy ; a great number of the poorest people are converted and live? I honour the rich for their station, but I do not envy them for their possessions. I cannot forget what Christ once said, ' How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God !'

" Oh ! my dear wife, if you did but know how to set a right value upon the precious promises which God has made to the poor, how thankful should I be !

" The expectation of the poor shall not perish. He delivereth the poor and needy from him that spoileth him. He has prepared of his goodness for the poor. The poor among men shall rejoice in the holy one. For he became poor, that we, through his poverty might be rich ; not in gold, but in grace.

" These promises comfort my soul, and would make me happy, even if I were deprived of that which I now enjoy. I can trust my Saviour for this world as well as for the next. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?

" The Lord of his mercy bless you, my dear Sarah, with the grace of a contented mind !"

Here the gracious man stopped : and whether affected by her husband's discourse, or by any other cause, I know not, but she made no reply. He then said, " Come, children, it is our time for rest ; shut the door and let us go to prayer."

" Forgive me," said I, laying hold of the door, as the

child was obeying her father's orders, "if I ask leave to make one in your family devotions, before I travel homeward. I have heard you, my friend, when you knew it not, and bless God for the sermon which you have this night preached to my heart."

The honest labourer blushed for a moment at this unexpected intrusion and declaration, but immediately said, "Sir, you are welcome to a poor man's dwelling, if you come in the name of the Lord."

I just looked round at the wife, who seemed to be startled at my sudden appearance, and the six fine children who sat near her, and then said, "You were going to pray; I must beg of you, without regarding me, to go on, as if I were not here."

The man, whom I could not but love and reverence, with a simple, unaffected, modest, and devout demeanour, did as I requested him. His prayer was full of tender affection and sincerity, expressed with great Scriptural propriety, and was in all respects such as became the preacher of those sentiments which I had overheard him deliver to his wife just before.

When he had finished, each of his children, according to the good old patriarchal custom of better days, kneeled down before him in turn to receive a father's blessing.

It was now late, and the rain was over. I gave the poor man my blessing, and received his in return. I wished them good night, and went onwards to my own home, reflecting, with much self-abasement of heart, what an honour and comfort it is to be a poor man, rich in faith.

