

THE
OAK - GROVE.

BY

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[Tonna, C.E.B.P.]

“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation : I the Lord will hasten it in his time.”—Isaiah lx. 22.

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THE OAK-GROVE.

I was walking in my favourite grove, where the oaks, whose lofty branches had lately afforded a pleasant shade from the heat of summer, were fast losing their rich leaves. Yellow, shrivelled, and dry, they lay in heaps upon the grass, mingled with a large quantity of acorns, which two or three children were busily collecting in their small baskets, as a feast for some favourite pig. So they told my little companion, who, on his part, was filling his handkerchief with the same treasures, for the purpose of raising such another grove of oaks in his garden—a piece of ground six feet long, by one foot wide—so mightily does man's ambition, even at six years old, overstep his means!

Having neither a pig to provide for, nor room in my garden for oaks to grow, I picked up a single acorn, and walked slowly on ; considering it as an object always interesting, but far more so now, that the light is surely dawning which shall shine throughout the earth—now, when the kingdoms of this world are agitated on every side, by the beginnings of those tumults which are to prevail before they become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. I fancied the acorn planted, and springing forth ; and rising into a mighty tree : and then pictured to myself of what awful, terrible, and glorious scenes it might one day be the witness. I considered the present and past ages of the world, and while the scattered leaves flew round me, on the blast of autumn, they sent home to my heart the affecting lamentation of the prophet, “ *We all*

do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind, have carried us away."

There is something very striking to my mind in the lofty unconcern with which the tree seems to stretch forth its branches, above the withering leaves, that so lately were its beauty and its boast. Even so does the proud world overlook its children, who have been laid low by the hand of death. While they lived, men spoke well of them, but now, their pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of their viols: the worm is spread under them, and the worms cover them. The remnant, instead of being affrighted at their removal, and giving glory to the God of heaven, scarcely cast a passing glance upon their graves; but continue unmoved, in pride, impenitence, and rebellion against the Most High. Man that is in honour and understandeth not, is likened

them—Papa unexpectedly put a stop to the whole affair, by declaring that she must also have a ring through her nose, unless she could prove to him that one in the ear was either more necessary or more useful.

This, of course, could not be proved; and the trinkets were exchanged by the friend who brought them, for something better suited to the child. But such an effect had the conversation upon her young mind, that it led to a habit of valuing things according to their real usefulness; and when twenty years afterwards, she was brought to feel the true worth of her soul, and to understand how many things that are highly esteemed among men, are abomination unto the Lord, she found cause to be thankful for this little incident of the ear-rings, as having been made the means of keeping her from many snares.

It does not often happen that a poor family can afford such things as these : but the richer sort of people sometimes do great harm by giving to them the cast off dresses of their own children, with, perhaps, such trimmings and flounces upon them, as make them quite grand in the sight of a cottager. I would never grudge an hour's work to the task of stripping these off before I part with articles that my friends are so good as to give me for the poor. As to my own wardrobe, I hope *that* is always arranged according to the counsel of the Apostle, or rather the command of the Most High : for it is He, who, by the mouth of St. Paul and St. Peter, thus speaks, " I will, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety ; not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array." 1 Tim. ii. 9. " Whose

not only to the leaves that fade, but to the beasts that perish.

In the midst of these solemn reflections, my eye was caught by the glittering of a pair of small, but showy ear-rings, adorning one of those little girls who were gleaning for the pig. It was easy to see that she had not long worn the useless ornaments; and was very vain of the consequence which they were supposed to add to her appearance. At any time, and in any place, finery displeases me: especially when displayed by the poor. How much more then, when every object around us seemed made to teach humility, and "to hide pride from man!"

Perhaps it was but yesterday that the little girl suffered the painful operation of having her ears bored, that these foolish trinkets might be made to dangle from them: and perhaps in that deed her character was

fixed for time—and for eternity!—
Oh that parents would be wise, and
consider the *end* of all that they do,
and say, in regard to their children!
The world, the flesh, and the devil,
are so closely bound together, that it
is hard to serve either of the two first
without doing the work of the last,
and we all know how difficult it is
to straighten the tree which has
been allowed, as a sapling, to grow
crooked.

I once knew a little girl, in a far
higher rank of life than that of the
child whom I was observing, but
whose father had the judgment to
disapprove of all needless ornament.
When she was about seven years old,
a relation coming to the house on a
visit, brought her a very fine pair of
ear-rings; and as the party were
settling that little Miss should on the
next day have her ears bored—for
they were still just as God made

adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel." 1 Pet. iii. 3. And Isaiah spake as moved by the Holy Ghost, when he sternly reprov'd the daughters of Zion for their haughtiness and pride; and declared that the Lord should take away "the bravery of their tinkling ornaments." I would not dare to glory in my shame—and the clothing which we are compelled to wear is the consequence and the memorial of man's transgression.— Shall I make a boast of Adam's sin? Shall I trim my dress with what would buy a blanket for some shivering, bed-ridden fellow creature, chilled with age and poverty; or defend the tender limbs of some weak infant from the cold; or satisfy the hunger of both? I hope not.

I was thus thinking, as I trod over the brown leaves, while a slight driz-

zling rain that began to fall, made me thankful for a warm cloak, and encreased my pity for those who had no such protection even from a storm, while obliged to work in the open air.

My little companion cared not for the change in the weather, so busy was he with the acorns : nor did the other children leave their employment. They gleaned from necessity, he for amusement ; but to observe the little fellow's eagerness any one might have supposed that his dinner depended upon his work. Seeing him quite loaded with acorns, I called him to me, and proposed his putting them into the basket of the little girls.

“ No : I cannot spare them. I am going to take them home.”

“ Why, what can you possibly do with so many ?”

“ Oh ! I can play with them.”

“ But the pig would make a meal upon them ; and God certainly gives

them for the animals' food. He makes nothing in vain, though we often put His gifts to very wrong and foolish uses. I cannot think that we have a right to destroy even a handful of acorns ; but you may amuse yourself a while with them, and afterwards give them to a poor neighbour, who will be glad of them to put into his pig's trough. And now I will tell you how to be instructed, as well as amused, by these pretty shining things.

“ When reading the Bible, you will sometimes meet with what you cannot as yet understand ; and even when you are much older, you may still find some difficult passages. Now, it is certain that our hearts are full of unbelief, by nature, and satan is always glad of an opportunity to make the most of our bad, proud disposition. We do not like to believe what we cannot understand ;

and this one thing would shut us out of heaven entirely, however wise and good we may fancy ourselves. We must, therefore, always pray for faith: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'

"But what is faith?"

"I am going to tell you, in the language of a poor old woman, who, on being asked the same question, answered, '*It's taking God at His word.*' Suppose I was to say to you, 'plant this acorn; and if it live it will become an oak,' would you believe me?"

"Yes, to be sure I would. Don't I know that oaks grow from acorns?"

"You do. You have been told so; and you have seen the acorn fall from the oak, and have pulled up a young plant, with the shell of the acorn still hanging to the root. But suppose I met a person who had never seen any thing of the sort, nor

knew any thing about the growth of vegetables, and were to show him a handful of acorns, and say, 'See here; if you put these small round things in the earth, they may one day be made into great ships; or yield food enough every year to fatten hundreds of swine; or provide beams and floors, tables and chairs, for a whole village,' would he not think that I wanted to deceive him?"

"I dare say he would, indeed."

"The change is so wonderful that nobody would believe it; and even as it is, nobody can explain it, though it is not possible to deny what we see with our own eyes every day. God requires us to believe some things which as yet we cannot fully perceive: because, as the Apostle says, we now see 'through a glass, darkly,' yet the Lord can enable us to believe, though we see not. Thus you are told that by the sin of one,

the whole world is become sinful ; and that, by the death of another One, sin is forgiven, and man made holy and happy again ; and our believing this is necessary to our salvation. In ' the man, Christ Jesus, ' dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, ' That is more amazing than that the oak should dwell in the acorn ; but God tells you that it is so ; and faith assures you that, what God says, is, and must be true. ' The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin ; ' you know not how ; but your sin will never be cleansed unless you believe it. Satan knows all this very well : and will do all in his power to keep you from believing. But look on the acorn, and be humbled. Acknowledge how ignorant, blind, and weak you are : and from the least of God's visible works learn how necessary it is to pray for faith, that you may believe the words

by which you shall be made wise unto salvation."

Look to the heavens above,
 To earth that smiles beneath,
 And read Jehovah's power and love
 On all that move and breathe.

The ocean, land, and sky,
 Are leaves in one vast book ;
 His glorious hand is ever nigh,
 'Tis seen where'er we look.

The acorn at my feet,
 Hid in its dusty bed,
 Shall burst from forth its low retreat,
 And shade the path I tread.

Thus, by thy grace, O Lord,
 True wisdom would I learn,
 In ev'ry page throughout thy word
 Its fulness to discern.

Each promise there bestow'd
 Is in rich bounty giv'n,
 To bloom above the narrow road,
 And shade my path to heav'n,

THE END.