

THE
BURYING GROUND.

BY

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“Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go
about the streets.”—ECCLES. xii.

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CHARLES F. ...
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THE BURYING GROUND.

“WHAT is that man going to do with the grass, Aunt?” said a little boy, as he saw a labourer carrying away some fresh green sods that he had just dug from a piece of waste ground.

“He is going, my dear,” replied his Aunt, “to do that for another person, which he may, perhaps, do both for you and for me before long.”

“What can that be, I wonder,” said John, smiling. “Let us follow him, Aunt.”

They did so. The man passed down a little alley of trees, and entered some large folding gates of iron, which led into a very spacious square, enclosed completely by a low wall, on which was an iron railing, forming a very strong and hand-

some fence. The lady and her little nephew soon found themselves within it.

“Why, this is a church-yard,” said John.

“Not exactly, my dear, for the church is not in it; but this is the burying ground, and a beautiful place it is.”

John looked about him, and certainly agreed with his Aunt. The spot was completely surrounded by a grove of firs, that pointed their tall green heads far above the iron palisades. Just within the fence, a great number of laurels were planted, the richly shining leaves of which looked doubly bright, as they rested against the black railings, and so near to the dark firs. The short grass was soft as velvet, and green as an emerald; and beautiful little flower beds surrounded several of the tombs. Over one, hung a rich weeping willow, an acacia shaded another, and a

third was placed between two young cypress trees. A great deal of the ground was yet unbroken, for the place had not been many years laid out; and it was not used for interment generally, but only for those belonging to a national institution near it. At one end was a row of humble graves, each with its white head-stone and simple inscription; and upon the last of these the labourer, whom John had seen, was carefully laying down the green sods that he had dug.

To this grave they walked, and the lady asked her little nephew if he knew who was buried there.

“I suppose it is the soldier’s wife,” said he.

“Yes. One week ago, that woman was as little likely, according to human appearances, as you or I now seem, to become the inhabitant of a grave. Sudden illness seized her and ended in death, almost imme-

diately. You know my child, that we visited her only four days back, and you saw with what mingled hope and terror she listened when I spoke of judgment to come—of the Judge who is likewise the Saviour of every true penitent, who clings to His cross, and casts his soul upon Him. You saw the agony of that dying woman; you kneeled with us in prayer to the God of the spirits of all flesh, that He would be pleased to grant unto her repentance and forgiveness of sins; and you heard, in three hours after, that she had breathed her last. She is under our feet, John, shut up in a coffin, covered over with the damp earth, and there to remain till the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall arise, and the books shall be opened, out of which the dead must be judged.”

John's heart was too full to allow of his speaking just then—so, after a pause his Aunt went on——

“ I told you, my love, that the grave-digger might soon do for us what he is now doing for this poor corpse. And oh ! what a solemn—what an important question it is, where will our souls be, when our bodies are committed to the dust ? At all times important and solemn beyond any other subject whatever, but does it not appear even more so, standing as we here do, just over the lifeless remains of one whom we so lately saw able to ask the question which is now for ever set at rest, as concerns *her* soul ? If a voice could issue from these mounds of earth, surely—surely, every one of them would cry aloud, what now they silently seem to teach us,—‘ Prepare to meet thy God ! ’ ”

“ Let us come here very often, Aunt,” said John, “ it will keep me thinking of death, and preparing for it.”

“ It might, indeed, lead you daily

to think of death, my dear child ; but it is very possible to do so, without rightly preparing for it. That is the office of the Holy Spirit, to keep alive in your heart such a sense of eternal things, as shall enable you, according to the Apostle's language, to ' die daily.' The poor Roman Catholics, whom, whilst we lament their errors, we should pity and teach, have departed from the truth of the gospel, and made the commandment of God of no effect by their traditions and inventions ; they have many such ways of keeping themselves in what they vainly suppose to be a religious frame of mind. They have death's heads, and cross bones, and black garments, with a number of words and ceremonies to remind them of their end ; but neglecting to seek the great gift of God, the assistance of the Holy Ghost ; and not reading the blessed Bible, in order to be made wise unto salvation, their work

is vain, their hope a delusion, and their light darkness. It is easy to let our thoughts descend into the grave, and it is well so to do, for there our Lord descended, and there too our own bodies shall come. But our chief wisdom is to look up, where the risen Saviour has ascended, and now sits on the right hand of God—to consider the glories of that high and holy place, and what the Lord has declared concerning those who shall dwell there with Him; and then to examine ourselves, and try what fitness there is in us for such a state.

“When I talk of fitness, my dear child, I do not mean to say that it is possible for us to be, or to do, any thing deserving of such blessedness. No. *We* are all as an unclean thing, and all *our* righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But if we be indeed washed in the blood of Christ Jesus, we are also justified in God’s sight,

through Him ; and if we be so washed and justified, we shall be sanctified too by the power of the Holy Ghost: though in ourselves, that is in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing, yet we shall both see and hate our sinfulness, and constantly be praying, ‘ Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.’ We shall be growing in grace, loving God with a more perfect love, and hating sin with a more perfect hatred, every day. We shall take that delight in the ways of holiness which the world takes in the ways of folly and wickedness, and devote our whole selves, mind, body, and estate, to the service of our heavenly Lord and Master ; doing all possible good to our fellow-creatures, *not* by way of deserving heaven, but *because*, ‘ if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.’ Do you rightly understand what I mean by fitness for the presence of God ?

“ Yes, Aunt, I think I do. God must love me, and make me love Him, and then I shall always try to do what pleases Him.”

“ True, my dear : but God cannot love any thing *unholy* like us ; therefore we must be ‘ accepted in the beloved.’ Our sins must all be blotted out by the blood of the Lamb, and our hearts changed by the Holy Spirit ; and we must be numbered among the little flock to whom the Lord Jesus says, ‘ it is His Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom.’ Neither could we love God, until we behold Him, ‘ in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.’ The guilty rebel cannot love the King who is prepared to punish his treason ; but when he finds himself pardoned and delivered, then indeed he must love. Let us but have this sweet assurance of the Lord’s power and willingness to save, and find in

ourselves a heart softened and renewed by Him, and then I know not what can be more profitable than to look upon a scene like this. For not only will it make our own troubles seem lighter, as the traveller finds the storm more bearable after he has got within sight of his home ; but it must, if we use it rightly, fill us with greater zeal for the conversion of others, when we look on the graves of many to whom the sweet sound of the Gospel can never more come,—many perhaps, who despised and rejected it for the wretched pleasures of a sinful world, and who would now, if they had them, give millions of worlds that the offer was once more made to repent and be saved. Oh ! what a dreadful thought it is, that through our neglect, any soul should perish ! How cruel, how base, how ungrateful to our Redeemer, if we let pass one opportunity of trying to take a prey from Satan, and to add another

to the family of Jesus Christ ! From these graves must every mouldering body arise at the judgment day, and would you not be indeed rejoiced to think that every one of them should awake to the resurrection of life ?”

“ Yes, indeed Aunt : I do hope that they all will be saved.”

“ We cannot tell. *Their* state is now unchangeable. But look around you among the living, and see if there be none to whom you may become an instrument of mercy ; that, if it should be your lot to look down on their graves also, you may reflect with joy, on having done what you could to bring them to Jesus.

“ Come now to the opposite corner, John. Here is a row of little mounds, of which the longest must be the resting-place of a child no bigger than yourself. What a lesson is here ! Surely this smaller spot must enclose an infant, which only just opened its eye on the world, and

then took flight to a better. The Scripture is very full of consolation respecting such : we are assured that they partake in Adam's sin by nature, but grace bestows on them eternal life, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Sleep, little baby, in your cold dark bed ; your spirit is with Him who gave it, and there too shall your body be, in His own good time."

"Aunt," said John, "here is a daisy growing on the grave that belongs to a child like me. It is just my length. I will keep the daisy to remind me that little children die," and he plucked the flower.

"That daisy will soon wither too, my dear, however carefully you keep it, and will then more powerfully shew you how fading are all earthly things. I would wish you to be as humble, as simple, and unpretending among men, as that daisy is among flowers. Like it, you are of

the earth, and must wait all the days of your appointed time thereon ; but may your eye also be turned to heaven, and may you preserve as cheerful a composure among all mortal changes, as does that little flower, smiling amid the mansions of the dead ! You are now nearer to your last hour than when we began this conversation. May the Spirit of Holiness so increase your growth in grace, that no single hour shall be passed in vanity. All is vanity that draws us not nearer to God : the very thought of foolishness is sin. But ‘ draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.’ ‘ In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.’ ”

What thoughts, but sweetest, holiest thoughts
 Should rise within my breast,
 Where wicked ones torment no more,
 And weary ones may rest ?

Here weeps the graceful willow branch,
 And droops the cypress tree,
 And here a thousand sacred joys
 Awake to gladden me,

The tender flowers beneath the beam,
 Their opening petals spread,
 And sweetly they look down and smile
 Upon the peaceful dead.

And like a flower that from a grave
 Extracts its lowly birth,
 My grateful soul desires to bloom
 On this dark mound of earth.

Her root should in the tomb be fix'd,
 Where Jesus deign'd to sleep ;
 And beams of grace should shine on her,
 And dews of mercy weep :

Till angels came to bear away
 The trembler on their wing,
 And plant her by thy glorious throne,
 My Father and my King !

THE END.