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THE
VILLAGE
IN
THE MOUNTAINS.



See page 5.

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THE

VILLAGE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

M. ———, a merchant at the head of one of the first commercial houses in Paris, had lately occasion to visit the manufactories established in the mountainous tracts of the Departments of the Loire and the Puy de Dôme. The road that conducted him back to Lyons traversed a country rich in natural productions, and glowing with all the charms of an advanced and promising Spring. The nearer view was unusually diversified; not only by the fantastic forms of mountains, the uncertain course of small and tributary streams, and the varying hues of fields of pasture, corn, vines, and vegetables; but by the combinations and contrasts of nature and of art, and the occupations of rural and commercial industry. Factories and furnaces were seen rising amidst barns and sheep-cotes; peasants were digging and ploughs gliding amidst forges and founderies; verdant slopes and graceful clumps of trees were scattered amidst the black and ugly mouths of exhausted coal pits, and the gentle murmur of the stream was subdued by the loud rattle of the loom. Sometimes M. ——— and his friend halted amidst all that is delightful and soothing; and after a short advance found themselves amidst barrenness, deformity, and confusion. The remoter scenery was not less impressive. Behind them were the rugged mountains of Puy de Dôme; the lofty Tavaré lifted its majestic head beside them, and far before appeared the brilliant summit of Mont Blanc.

In this state of mind he arrived at the skirts of a hamlet, placed on the declivity of a mountain; and being desirous of finding a shorter and more retired track, he stopped at a little house to inquire the way. From the windows several females were watching the movements of a little child; and just as M. ——— inquired for a road

across the mountains, the infant was in danger of being crushed by a coal cart which had entered the street. The cries and alarms of the females were met by the activity of the travellers, and the companion of M. — set off to snatch the infant from danger, and place him in security. An elderly female from the second story gave M. —, who was still on his horse, the directions he desired; and, at the same time, expressed her uneasiness that the gentleman should have had the trouble to seek the child. “Madam, (interrupted M. —,) my friend is only performing his duty: we ought to do to another as we would that another should do to us; and, in this wretched world we are bound to assist each other. You are kind enough to direct us travellers in the right road, and surely the least we can do is to rescue your child from danger. The Holy Scriptures teach us these duties, and the Gospel presents us the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were in ignorance and danger, came to our world to seek and to save that which was lost.” “Ah! Sir, (replied the good woman,) you are very condescending, and what you say is very true; but your language surprises me: it is so many years since in this village we have heard such truths, and especially from the lips of a stranger.” “Madam, (resumed M. —,) we are all strangers here, and sojourners bound to eternity; there is but one road, one guide, one Saviour, who can conduct us safely; if we feel this, young or old, rich or poor, we are all one in Christ; and, however scattered on earth, shall all arrive at the heavenly city, to which he is gone to prepare mansions for us.” “These doctrines, Sir, (exclaimed the female) support the hearts of many of us, who have scarcely travelled beyond our own neighbourhood; and it is so rare and so delightful to hear them from others, that if it will not be an abuse of your Christian politeness, I would request you to alight and visit my humble apartment.” “I shall comply most cheerfully with your request,” (replied M. —,) for though time is precious, I shall be thankful to spend a few minutes in these mountains, among those with whom I hope to dwell for ever on Mount Zion.” My friend M. — mounted to the second story, followed by his companion. He found the female with whom he had conversed, surrounded by her daughters and her grand-daughters, all

4

busily employed in five looms, filled with galloons and ribbons, destined for the capital and the most distant cities of the world. The good widow was between 60 and 70 years of age; her appearance was neat and clean; and all the arrangements of her apartment bespoke industry, frugality, and piety. "Ah! Sir, (she exclaimed, as M. — entered,) how happy am I to receive such a visitor!" "Madam, (replied M. —) I am not worthy to enter under this roof." "Why, Sir, (exclaimed the widow,) you talked to us of Jesus Christ and ——" "Yes, Madam, but I am a poor guilty sinner, and hope only for salvation through the cross. I was yesterday at St. —, where they were planting a cross with great ceremony; were you there?" "No, Sir; for it is of little use to erect crosses in the streets, if we do not carry the cross in our hearts, and are not crucified to the world. But, Sir, if you will not be offended, may I ask what you are called?" M. —, pretending to give a general sense to the French phraseology, answered, "My name, Madam, is —." "Thank you, Sir, I shall not forget; but this is not what I meant; I wished to know whether you are Protestant or Catholic, a pastor or a priest?" "Madam, I have not the honour to be either; I am a merchant; I desire to be a Christian, and to have no other title but a disciple of Christ." "That is exactly as we are here, Sir, (exclaimed the good widow, and added,) but, as you are so frank, are you, Sir, Catholic or Protestant?" "Catholic," replied M. —. Madam looked confused, and observed, "that it was rare for the Catholics to talk as her visitor had done." "I am a Catholic, (resumed M. —,) but not a member of the *Roman* Catholic church. I love all that love our Lord Jesus in sincerity. I do not ask in what fold they feed, so that they are guided and nourished by the good shepherd and bishop of souls." "O what a favour the Lord has granted us to meet with a Christian like ourselves, (said the affected widow, looking round her,) we desire to live in charity with all mankind. But, to be frank also, Sir, we do not go to mass, nor to confession, for we do not learn from our Testament, which is indeed almost worn out, that we are required to confess to sinners like ourselves, nor to worship the host, nor to perform penance for the salvation of our

souls ; and, we believe we can serve God acceptably in a cave, or in a chamber, or on a mountain. “ I confess, Madam, in my turn, (said M. —,) that I am exceedingly astonished to find such persons on such a spot ; pray how many may there be of your sentiments ? ”

“ Here, Sir, and scattered over the mountains, there are from 3 to 400. We meet on the Sunday evenings, and as often as we can, to pray to Jesus, to read the Testament, and to converse about the salvation of our souls. We are so much persecuted by the clergy, that we cannot appear as publicly as we wish. We are called *beguines* * and fools ; but we can bear this, and, I hope, a great deal more, for him who has suffered so much for us.”

While the conversation, of which this is a sketch, transpired, the rooms had filled, the neighbours had been informed and introduced, at the request of the worthy hostess ; and as many as could quit their occupations pressed to hear of the things of the kingdom of God. M. — desired to see the New Testament. It was presented. The title page was gone, the leaves were almost worn to shreds by the fingers of the weavers and labourers, and M. — could not discover the edition. A female, of respectable appearance approached M. —, and said “ Sir, for several years I have sought every where a New Testament, and I have offered any price for one in all the neighbouring villages, but in vain. Could you, Sir, possibly procure me a copy, I will gladly pay you any sum you demand—” “ Madam, I will not only procure you *one*, (replied M. — eagerly,) but in forty-eight hours I will send you half a dozen.” “ Is it possible ? (exclaimed the astonished villagers.) May we, Sir, believe the good news ? May we rely on your promise ? It appears too great—too good—we will pay for them now, Sir, if you please.” “ You may depend on receiving them, (said M. —,) if God prolongs my life. But I entreat you to do me the favour to accept them, as a proof of my Christian regard, and an expression of my gratitude, for having been permitted to enjoy, in this unpromising spot, the refreshing company of the followers of Christ.” The conversation then turned on the value of the sacred

* A term implying much the same as Methodist in England.

volume, and the sinfulness of those who withheld it from perishing and dejected sinners. After some time, the hostess inquired, "Pray, Sir, can you tell us if any thing extraordinary is passing in the world? We are shut out from all intercourse; but we have an impression that God is commencing a great work in the earth, and that wonderful events are coming to pass." "Great events have taken place, and news is arriving every day, (said M. —,) from all parts of the world, of the progress of the Gospel, and the fulfilments of the Holy Scriptures." He then gave to his attentive and enraptured auditory an outline of the moral changes accomplished by the diffusion of the Bible, the labours of Missionaries, and the establishment of schools; but only such an outline as was suited to their general ignorance of the state of what is called the religious world. And when he had concluded they all joined in the prayer—Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.

Anxious as was M. — to pursue his journey, he devoted three hours to this interview. He exhorted them to receive and practise only what they found in the Scriptures, to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and promised to use his influence to obtain for them a pastor who should feed them with knowledge and understanding. The termination of this extraordinary meeting was most affecting; tears of pleasure, gratitude, and regret streamed from the eyes of the mountaineers, and the traveller, though more deeply moved by having seen the grace of God than by all the scenes through which he had passed, went on his way rejoicing, and, following the directions of the good widow, he arrived at the town of S—. In this town he had correspondents among the principal inhabitants and authorities, and under the impression of all he had witnessed, he inquired, as if with the curiosity of a traveller, the name of the hamlet he had passed on the mountain, and the nature of the employment, and the character of its inhabitants. "The men, (said the mayor,) work in the mines, drive the teams, and labour in the fields: and the women and children weave. They are a very curious people, *outrés illuminés* (new lights), but the most honest work-people of the country—probity itself. We have no occasion to weigh our silk, either

when we give it out or take it in, for we are sure not to lose the value of a farthing, and the kindest creatures in the world; they will take their shirts off their backs to give to any one in distress; indeed, there is no wretchedness among them, for though poor, they are industrious, temperate, charitable, and always assist each other; but touch them on their religion, and they are almost idiots. They never go to mass nor confession; in fact, they are not Christians, though the most worthy people in the world—and so droll; imagine those poor people, after working all the week, instead of enjoying the Sunday, and going to fêtes and balls to amuse themselves, they meet in each other's houses, and sometimes in the mountains, to read some book, and pray and sing hymns. They are very clever work-people, but they pass their Sundays and holidays stupidly enough." This testimony, so honourable to his new acquaintance, was confirmed to M. — from several quarters; and he learnt from others, what he had not been told by themselves, that besides their honesty and charity, so great is their zeal, that they flock from the different hamlets, and meet in the mountains in cold and bad weather, at eight or nine o'clock at night, to avoid the interruption of their enemies, and to sing and pray.

These accounts were not calculated to lessen the interest excited in the breast of M. —, and immediately on his arrival at Lyons, he dispatched six copies of the New Testament, and some copies of a tract entitled "*Les Deux Viellards*," (The Two Old Men.) Shortly after his return to Paris M. — received, through one of his correspondents of Lyons, a letter from the excellent widow with whom he had conversed. The modesty, dignity, and piety of this letter has induced me to subjoin a literal translation, not only to evince the influence of true religion, but to satisfy the reader, that in this narration no exaggerated statement has been made of the character of the mountaineers of St. —

"Sir, I have the honour to write you, to assure you of my very humble respects, and at the same time to acknowledge the reception of the six copies of the New Testament which you had the goodness and the generosity to send us. My family, myself, and my neighbours, know not how adequately to express our sincere gratitude: for we have nothing in the world so precious as that sacred

volume, which is the best food of our souls, and our certain guide to the heavenly Jerusalem.

“ As we believe and are assured that the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ could alone have inspired you with the desire to distribute the Sacred Scriptures to those who are disposed to make a holy use of them, we hope and believe that the Divine Saviour will be himself your recompence: and that he will give to you, as well as to all of us, the grace to understand, and to seek a part in his second coming: for this ought to be our only and constant desire in the times of darkness and tribulation in which we live.

“ It is with this view, Sir, that I entreat you to have the goodness to send six more copies of the sacred volume for several of my friends, who are delighted, not only with the beauty of the type, but especially with the purity of the edition; for it is sufficient to see the name of Monsieur le Maitre de Sacy, to be assured that this edition is strictly conformable to the sacred text. Sir, as the persons who have charged me to entreat you to send six more copies of the New Testament would be sorry to abuse your generosity, they also charge me to say, that if you accomplish their wishes, as your truly Christian kindness induces them to hope, and will mark the price on the books, they shall feel it to be a pleasure and a duty to remit you the amount when I acknowledge the arrival of the parcel. Could you also add six copies of the little tract, entitled ‘ *Les Deux Viellards*,’ (The Two Old Men.)

“ I entreat you, Sir, to excuse the liberty I have taken, and to believe that, while life remains, I am, in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“ Your very humble servant,

“ The WIDOW ———.”

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