

OLD FATHER MORRIS.

A SKETCH FROM NATURE.

Of all the marvels that astonished my childhood, there is none I remember to this day with so much interest as the old man whose name forms my caption. When I knew him, he was an aged clergyman, settled over an obscure village in New England. He had enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education, had a strong, original power of thought, an omnipotent imagination, and much general information; but so early and so deeply had the habits and associations of the plough, the farm, and country life wrought themselves into his mind, that his after acquirements could only mingle with them, forming an unexampled amalgam like unto nothing but itself.

He was an ingrain New Englander, and whatever might have been the source of his information, it came out in Yankee form, with the strong provinciality of Yankee dialect.

It is in vain to attempt to give a full picture of such a genuine unique; but some slight and imperfect dashes may help the imagination to a faint idea of what none can fully conceive but those who have seen and heard old Father Morris.

Suppose yourself one of half a dozen children, and you hear the cry,

"Father Morris is coming!" You run to the window or door, and you see a tall, bulky old man, with a pair of saddle bags on one arm, hitching his old horse with a fumbling carefulness, and then deliberately stumping towards the house. You notice his tranquil, florid, full-moon face, enlightened by a pair of great round blue eyes, that roll with dreamy inattentiveness on all the objects around; and as he takes off his hat, you see the white curling wig that sets off his round head. He comes towards you, and as you stand staring, with all the children around, he deliberately puts his great hand on your head, and, with deep, rumbling voice, inquires,--

"How d'ye do, my darter? is your daddy at home?" "My darter" usually makes off as fast as possible, in an unconquerable giggle. Father Morris goes into the house, and we watch him at every turn, as, with the most liberal simplicity, he makes himself at home, takes off his wig, wipes down his great face with a checked pocket handkerchief, helps himself hither and thither to whatever he wants, and asks for such things as he cannot lay his hands on, with all the comfortable easiness of childhood.

I remember to this day how we used to peep through the crack of the door, or hold it half ajar and peer in, to watch his motions; and how mightily diverted we were with his deep, slow manner of speaking, his heavy, cumbrous walk, but, above all, with the wonderful faculty of "hemming" which he possessed.

His deep, thundering, protracted "A-hem-em" was like nothing else that

ever I heard; and when once, as he was in the midst of one of these performances, the parlor door suddenly happened to swing open, I heard one of my roguish brothers calling, in a suppressed tone, "Charles! Charles! Father Morris has hemmed the door open!"--and then followed the signs of a long and desperate titter, in which I sincerely sympathized.

But the morrow is Sunday. The old man rises in the pulpit. He is not now in his own humble little parish, preaching simply to the hoers of corn and planters of potatoes, but there sits Governor D., and there is Judge R., and Counsellor P., and Judge G. In short, he is before a refined and literary audience. But Father Morris rises; he thinks nothing of this; he cares nothing; he knows nothing, as he himself would say, but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He takes a passage of Scripture to explain; perhaps it is the walk to Emmaus, and the conversation of Jesus with his disciples. Immediately the whole start out before you, living and picturesque: the road to Emmaus is a New England turnpike; you can see its mile stones, its mullein stalks, its toll gates. Next the disciples rise, and you have before you all their anguish, and hesitation, and dismay talked out to you in the language of your own fireside. You smile; you are amused; yet you are touched, and the illusion grows every moment. You see the approaching stranger, and the mysterious conversation grows more and more interesting. Emmaus rises in the distance, in the likeness of a New England village, with a white meeting house and spire. You follow the travellers; you enter the house with them; nor do you wake from your trance until, with streaming eyes, the

preacher tells you that "they saw it was the Lord Jesus--and what a pity it was they could not have known it before!"

It was after a sermon on this very chapter of Scripture history that Governor Griswold, in passing out of the house, laid hold on the sleeve of his first acquaintance: "Pray tell me," said he, "who is this minister?"

"Why, it is old Father Morris."

"Well, he is an oddity--and a genius too, I declare!" he continued. "I have been wondering all the morning how I could have read the Bible to so little purpose as not to see all these particulars he has presented."

I once heard him narrate in this picturesque way the story of Lazarus. The great bustling city of Jerusalem first rises to view, and you are told, with great simplicity, how the Lord Jesus "used to get tired of the noise;" and how he was "tired of preaching, again and again, to people who would not mind a word he said;" and how, "when it came evening, he used to go out and see his friends in Bethany." Then he told about the house of Martha and Mary: "a little white house among the trees," he said; "you could just see it from Jerusalem." And there the Lord Jesus and his disciples used to go and sit in the evenings, with Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus.

Then the narrator went on to tell how Lazarus died, describing, with

tears and a choking voice, the distress they were in, and how they sent a message to the Lord Jesus, and he did not come, and how they wondered and wondered; and thus on he went, winding up the interest by the graphic minutiae of an eye witness, till he woke you from the dream by his triumphant joy at the resurrection scene.

On another occasion, as he was sitting at a tea table, unusually supplied with cakes and sweetmeats, he found an opportunity to make a practical allusion to the same family story. He said that Mary was quiet and humble, sitting at her Savior's feet to hear his words; but Martha thought more of what was to be got for tea. Martha could not find time to listen to Christ. No; she was "'cumbered with much serving'--around the house, frying fritters and making gingerbread."

Among his own simple people, his style of Scripture painting was listened to with breathless interest. But it was particularly in those rustic circles, called "conference meetings," that his whole warm soul unfolded, and the Bible in his hands became a gallery of New England paintings.

He particularly loved the evangelists, following the footsteps of Jesus Christ, dwelling upon his words, repeating over and over again the stories of what he did, with all the fond veneration of an old and favored servant.

Sometimes, too, he would give the narration an exceedingly practical

turn, as one example will illustrate.

He had noticed a falling off in his little circle that met for social prayer, and took occasion, the first time he collected a tolerable audience, to tell concerning "the conference meeting that the disciples attended" after the resurrection.

"But Thomas was not with them." "Thomas not with them!" said the old man, in a sorrowful voice. "Why, what could keep Thomas away? Perhaps," said he, glancing at some of his backward auditors, "Thomas had got cold-hearted, and was afraid they would ask him to make the first prayer; or perhaps," said he, looking at some of the farmers, "Thomas was afraid the roads were bad; or perhaps," he added, after a pause, "Thomas had got proud, and thought he could not come in his old clothes." Thus he went on, significantly summing up the common excuses of his people; and then, with great simplicity and emotion, he added, "But only think what Thomas lost! for in the middle of the meeting, the Lord Jesus came and stood among them! How sorry Thomas must have been!" This representation served to fill the vacant seats for some time to come.

At another time Father Morris gave the details of the anointing of David to be king. He told them how Samuel went to Bethlehem, to Jesse's house, and went in with a "How d'ye do, Jesse?" and how, when Jesse asked him to take a chair, he said he could not stay a minute; that the Lord had sent him to anoint one of his sons for a king; and how, when Jesse

called in the tallest and handsomest, Samuel said "he would not do;" and how all the rest passed the same test; and at last, how Samuel says, "Why, have not you any more sons, Jesse?" and Jesse says, "Why, yes, there is little David down in the lot;" and how, as soon as ever Samuel saw David, "he slashed the oil right on to him;" and how Jesse said "he never was so beat in all his life."

Father Morris sometimes used his illustrative talent to very good purpose in the way of rebuke. He had on his farm a fine orchard of peaches, from which some of the ten and twelve-year-old gentlemen helped themselves more liberally than even the old man's kindness thought expedient.

Accordingly, he took occasion to introduce into his sermon one Sunday, in his little parish, an account of a journey he took; and how he was "very warm and very dry;" and how he saw a fine orchard of peaches that made his mouth water to look at them. "So," says he, "I came up to the fence and looked all around, for I would not have touched one of them without leave for all the world. At last I spied a man, and says I, 'Mister, won't you give me some of your peaches?' So the man came and gave me nigh about a hat full. And while I stood there eating, I said, 'Mister, how do you manage to keep your peaches?' 'Keep them!' said he, and he stared at me; 'what do you mean?' 'Yes, sir,' said I; 'don't the boys steal them?' 'Boys steal them!' said he. 'No, indeed!' 'Why, sir,' said I, 'I have a whole lot full of peaches, and I cannot get half of them'"--here the old man's voice grew tremulous--"because the boys in

my parish steal them so.' 'Why, sir,' said he, 'don't their parents teach them not to steal?' And I grew all over in a cold sweat, and I told him 'I was afeard they didn't.' 'Why, how you talk!' says the man; 'do tell me where you live?' Then," said Father Morris, the tears running over, "I was obliged to tell him I lived in the town of G." After this Father Morris kept his peaches.

Our old friend was not less original in the logical than in the illustrative portions of his discourses. His logic was of that familiar, colloquial kind which shakes hands with common sense like an old friend. Sometimes, too, his great mind and great heart would be poured out on the vast themes of religion, in language which, though homely, produced all the effects of the sublime. He once preached a discourse on the text, "the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity;" and from the beginning to the end it was a train of lofty and solemn thought. With his usual simple earnestness, and his great, rolling voice, he told about "the Great God--the Great Jehovah--and how the people in this world were flustering and worrying, and afraid they should not get time to do this, and that, and t'other. But," he added, with full-hearted satisfaction, "the Lord is never in a hurry; he has it all to do, but he has time enough, for he inhabiteth eternity." And the grand idea of infinite leisure and almighty resources was carried through the sermon with equal strength and simplicity.

Although the old man never seemed to be sensible of any thing tending to the ludicrous in his own mode of expressing himself, yet he had



considerable relish for humor, and some shrewdness of repartee. One time, as he was walking through a neighboring parish, famous for its profanity, he was stopped by a whole flock of the youthful reprobates of the place:--

"Father Morris, Father Morris! the devil's dead!"

"Is he?" said the old man, benignly laying his hand on the head of the nearest urchin; "you poor fatherless children!"

But the sayings and doings of this good old man, as reported in the legends of the neighborhood, are more than can be gathered or reported. He lived far beyond the common age of man, and continued, when age had impaired his powers, to tell over and over again the same Bible stories that he had told so often before.

I recollect hearing of the joy that almost broke the old man's heart, when, after many years' diligent watching and nurture of the good seed in his parish, it began to spring into vegetation, sudden and beautiful as that which answers the patient watching of the husbandman. Many a hard, worldly-hearted man--many a sleepy, inattentive hearer--many a listless, idle young person, began to give ear to words that had long fallen unheeded. A neighboring minister, who had been sent for to see and rejoice in these results, describes the scene, when, on entering the little church, he found an anxious, crowded auditory assembled around their venerable teacher, waiting for direction and instruction. The old

man was sitting in his pulpit, almost choking with fulness of emotion as he gazed around. "Father," said the youthful minister, "I suppose you are ready to say with old Simeon, 'Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation.'" "Sartin, sartin," said the old man, while the tears streamed down his cheeks, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

It was not many years after that this simple and loving servant of Christ was gathered in peace unto Him whom he loved. His name is fast passing from remembrance, and in a few years, his memory, like his humble grave, will be entirely grown over and forgotten among men, though it will be had in everlasting remembrance by Him who "forgetteth not his servants," and in whose sight the death of his saints is precious.