

THE
MONTHLY VISITANT;

OR

Something Old.

"NO MAN HAVING DRUNK OLD WINE, STRAIGHTWAY
DESIRETH NEW; FOR HE SAITH, THE OLD IS
BETTER."

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FOR DECEMBER, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTEEN.

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The Visitant, &c.

INSTRUCTION FROM THE

GRAVE:

In which are unfolded the behaviour, sentiments, and prospects of persons of different ranks, characters, and situations, in their Dying Moments.

VIEWING the poor remains of those who once were dear to us, a truth, important to be remembered, sounds in the ear, and impresses the heart—"Man that is born of a woman, is of a few days, and full of trouble.—He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down.—He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." He walks in a vain show. The Pageant moves forward, and disappears.—The son takes the place of the father, this generation of the former generation.—Where is Adam and his immediate descendants? Noah and the first settlers of the earth? The thousand thousands, who were members of the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman empires? They have passed. The place which once knew them knows them no more. Their names are erased from the catalogue of the living.

I look upon the body of a departed friend:—It is a lump of cold inanimate clay; a substance vile and perishable; which the worm shall devour, corruption shall waste, and time wear out.—But the spirit, the inhabitant of that body:—Is it also a lump of cold and inanimate clay; a substance vile and perishable; which the worm shall devour, corrup-

of the severest nights during this season, and before her escape was known had suffered so much by the cold, that she soon expired.

Many in town were pining through exposure and want, and must have perished had not seasonable aid been afforded.

The more immediate organs of relief are the overseers of the poor, but many cases must of necessity be concealed from them; these have claimed the notice of two societies, which consisting of females, can more feelingly sympathize with the afflicted and more effectually administer to their relief.

The female Episcopal Benevolent Society have administered to the *temporal* and *spiritual wants* of many. They have purchased and delivered wood, blankets and provisions. They have nursed the sick, procured for them medicine, and read to them the scripture, doing what was in their power to promote their comfort. Their works praise them, and they may expect a reward.

The Female Onesimus Society, originated in the Presbyterian church, at a moment when the religious feeling among our young females was strongly excited, and had no view at first but to cherish and direct these feelings, by reading the scripture, and celebrating the praises of redeeming love: but out of this arose a desire to be useful to others, in a manner most in their power, by making garments for the naked, no sooner was the suggestion made than it was carried into effect. They applied to their friends for money to procure materials, the application put a considerable fund into their hands, whereby they have been enabled to make three hundred garments. Their funds were exhausted, but much was yet to be done, they thought of a Charity-Sermon, and requested *Mr. Elias Harrison* for this purpose, who readily complied. Thus their labours have been continued, a sum beyond what they had any reason to expect being afforded. A copy of the sermon is here given, as a memorial of the labours of the society; and of the estimation in which these labours are held by the church and the community at large.

PHILEMON, VERSE 10, MIDDLE CLAUSE.

"ONESIMUS."

BRETHREN,

How inestimably valuable is the gospel of Christ! How consoling its doctrines, how lovely, how benevolent its precepts! Scrutinize the volumes of antiquity—penetrate the repositories of science, in every age—and collect into one mass, the combined wisdom of the world and to what does it all amount? Not a single ray of comfort does it impart to the desponding bosom—not a tear does it dry from the eye of the afflicted. The troubled billows of life continue to roll on without a remedy—the silent habitations of the dead, are still dark, cheerless, and uninviting.

Unenlightened by the illuminating influence of the gospel of Christ, the most stupendous human talents, have not unfrequently proved to the world, a conspicuous, a tremendous curse. What was a Plato, a Socrates, a Cicero, or a Seneca, compared with the unlettered fishermen of Galilee—the apostles of our Redeemer? What, but as the faint glimmerings of the glow-worm, to the glittering effulgence of the noon-day sun. I am unwilling to affirm that they died, as the brute dieth; but I mean little more when I say that they lived, and died like great heathen philosophers. Their exalted talents could never make the current of life flow uniformly even; their profound research, could never make death, less than the king of terrors;—and their philosophical speculations could never make the grave, other than a cheerless, gloomy, mansion. All beyond it, was still a land of darkness—an extended field of uncertainty and doubt.

And what were the moral precepts which they inculcated? Multitudinous in number—contradictory in sentiment—and often destructive and pernicious in practice. The diminutive concerns of ordinary life were thought too low to receive a passing glance from the soaring speculations of these heathen wonders. Like comets they rose, and sparkled, and glitter-

ed and excited the wondering gaze of an astonished world, for a season, and then like them they went away, without leaving much salutary influence behind. In them, the offending criminal, seldom found, a pardoning friend—in their moral precepts, the wretched poor seldom an advocate, seldom an accent of tenderness, or commiseration. And why was this? Because the day spring from on high, had never yet visited them:—the star of Jacob had not yet begun its revolution in their cheerless, moral hemisphere:—the Babe of Bethlehem had not yet commissioned his messengers of mercy.

Reverse the scene, contemplate for a moment the religion of Jesus. What are its doctrines, what its precepts? Peace on earth, and good will to man, is inscribed in effect on almost every page. How sweet how tender are its messages, to the heavy laden, heart broken sinner! Come unto me, are its cheering invitations, and I will give you rest. No sooner are its precious truths properly relished, and applied, than the trembling bosom ceases to throb with anxiety for the future—the cheek of the afflicted is no longer moistened with the tear of sorrow. Here no jarring sentiments—no contradictory principles, no pernicious doctrines, harass the enquiring mind, or keep it suspended in painful uncertainty. All is uniform, harmonious, and instructive; dissipating the obscurities of the passed, and lightening up the prospects yet to come. To civilize, and enlighten, to soften the rough and fiercer passions of the soul—calm the angry tumult of the mind—smooth the pillow of distress, give fortitude, and resignation in the hour of danger; and of death, and to unfold to lost man the blessed prospects of a glorious immortality, are the wonderful offices it is destined to perform, and the happy effects which it invariably produces.

But whatever duties the precepts of the gospel is found to inculcate, its willing disciples, joyfully execute. To do good to our fellow creatures, to comfort the afflicted, and to pardon the penitent and returning offender, were duties, which our blessed Saviour, his apostles, and the primitive fathers frequently enjoined, and in the performance of which they themselves were illustrious examples. An instance of this, is exhibited in the conduct of the writer of this epistle, towards the person designated in the text. Wherever a fair opportunity of doing good presented itself to the Apostle Paul, the uniform, active benevolence, of his ardent soul, would never

let him rest till it was done. Thus it was, in the case before us. The person under consideration had been a servant to Philemon. But having robbed his master, as it has been supposed, to a considerable amount, in order to escape the stroke of vindictive justice which awaited him where he was, he had fled to Rome, that he might hide himself among the numberless multitudes of that crowded metropolis. But even here he could not rest. Taught, as he doubtless had been, by his pious master, in the principles of the religion of Jesus, he knew, that though it might be easy for him to escape the vigilance of men, yet, that he was at the same time, under the notice and inspection of the Omniscient God. From his all-seeing eye, he dare not hope to escape. Harrowed up, and tormented with the insupportable stings of a guilty conscience the trembling culprit directs his hesitating steps to the prison of his masters friend—the Apostle of the Gentiles. How highly interesting must have been the interview! Paul was a prisoner—the guilty servant of his beloved Philemon was before him. What should he do? seize him, as a culprit, and send him back to receive the punishment due to his offences? No, brethren; the heart of the Apostle yearned over him. He beheld him trembling, destitute, without a friend; and at the same time, bending beneath the burthen of conscious guilt. He pities him. Improving the favorable opportunity, this prisoner of Christ, probes him to the bottom—makes him still more sensible of the enormity of his offences; and then, smarting under his wounds, directs him to the blood of the Redeemer. Here the wretched sufferer finds a healing balm, for all his wounds. Released from the heavy burden, which had long been pressing on his heart, his countenance again assumes the smile of serenity and peace. And immediately from being a wandering fugitive from justice, he becomes, the faithful companion, the affectionate friend, the constant attendant, and the unwearied comforter of his beloved father in the Lord.

But he must return to his master. Conscious, that he had done wrong, and knowing that his master was actuated by those blessed precepts of christian benevolence, which enjoins pardon to the penitent, even though he should have offended seventy and seven times; he longs to return to throw himself at his feet, and to receive sweet accents of pardon, the benediction of one whom he had injured. To prepare him for this greatest of earthly blessings, the Apostle Paul, (to whom he

had now become dear, by ties of the tenderest as well as the strongest kind) writes and sends with him that short epistle, of which the text constitutes a part. He goes, and is received. Not indeed as a servant; but as an affectionate christian brother. How dark, brethren, and how mysterious are the ways of providence! How inscrutable the councils of Omnipotence. Who could have imagined, that this man who was once endeavoring to escape observation in the crowded streets of the mistress of the world, was destined, at no distant period, to shine as a star of the first magnitude? And yet, if we may believe the early writers of the christian church, (and we have no reason to disbelieve them,) he was soon after, not only an eminent bishop but a triumphant martyr to the glorious cause of his adored Saviour. His name was Onesimus.

Names brethren, though often arbitrary sounds, introduced by the consent of mankind, for mutual convenience, in order to distinguish one person, or object from another, are still however, not unfrequently, full of meaning. This was particularly the case, among the polished inhabitants of Greece. There scarcely an individual received a name, that was not expressive of some peculiar quality, which, either the individual then possessed, or which it was hoped he ultimately would possess. This was the case with the name of the person under consideration. Onesimus slightly varied, to make it suit the idiom of the English language—in the original signifies useful; how aptly it was applied in the present instance, you will all of you, after what has been said, be able to form a pretty tolerable estimate.

Having, now, introduced the occasion, and explained the meaning of the text; we shall proceed to deduce from it those observations which it may naturally suggest: and then apply the subject to the particular object contemplated by the discourse.

Brethren, to be useful in the world, is one of the objects, and when extensively considered, perhaps the only one, to which we were destined by the Author of our being, in placing us in it. But when I say it was perhaps the only one, I expect not to be misunderstood. The great end of our existence, and that which ought ever to be the actuating principle of our conduct in life, is the glory of Him by whom we were created, and to whose munificence, we are constantly indebted for every blessing we enjoy. Considered in this point of

view the text assumes an importance far beyond any thing which you have probably been accustomed to ascribe to it. It is however no more than what legitimately belongs to it: and therefore demands your serious attention. Look at the law of God, that perfect transcript of his own moral excellence? And to what does it amount? Summed up in the language of one who spake as never man spake, (and who was a much more competent judge of this matter than all the self styled philosophers of the world :) it is this, love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thy self. When therefore I speak of being useful, as one of the grand objects of our existence; I wish to be understood in this extended sense. It is not that narrow, contracted, worldly, selfish utility, which confines its views and operations, to the little circle of our connexions, or to the still more narrow boundary of self, that I would recommend to your attention. No, verily, brethren; usefulness of this description, has not unfrequently been the cause of more mischief to the world in half an age, than could in many others, be repaired. It is this selfish spirit, given scope, which lights the flame of civil discord—makes the angry nations rush together, on mutual destruction—and which is doubtless daily sending crowded multitudes to the damnation of hell.

That man, who ever expects to be extensively useful in this life, in the restricted sense of the word, must be actuated by principles far different from these. He must be so on gospel principles. In one word he must be a pious christian, filled with supreme love to his heavenly Father—with equal love to his neighbour, as himself. A peculiar advantage which the religion of the despised Jesus possesses over every other, is, that its principles are no sooner rooted in the heart, than they uniformly impel to actions dignified, noble, rational, and benevolent. In them, are comprehended, every thing that can add to a nations peace—every thing that can conduce to an individual happiness. That society where they are prevalent will ever exhibit a spectacle of benevolence and affection:—that individual who possesses them, will ever welcome you with a smile. Here the wandering stranger, finds a home—the wretched sufferer, a consoling friend—the distressed poor, a willing advocate.

Surely then brethren, if this be fact, (and that it is not fancy, I appeal to the word of God—to the uniform experience of ages, to your own experience as well as observation) if

these things are so, it evidently becomes your duty to extend to it your patronage, your smiles, and your encouragement wherever it may appear. This should be done not only to individuals, but to every association, founded upon this solid basis, and which professes to be regulated by its pious and benevolent principles. And it is the cause of such an institution brethren, that I am this morning occupying this sacred desk to plead before you. And I thank my God, that I am not addressing a people whose hearts are rankling with enmity against every thing that bears the name of Jesus, or whose bosoms are steeled to the piercing cries of the wretched poor. I thank God, that I am addressing a congregation, who are not only disposed to listen with attention, but to sympathize, to feel, to act.

You have already had many calls upon your benevolence, and were it not for the assurance that another was still necessary—that the cause in which I am at present engaged was a good cause, that it was imperiously demanded by the dreadful situation of many among you, and that it was sanctioned too, by the word of God; after what you have already done, I should really blush to make it. But when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth—when the hurricane or tempest, the pestilence, or famine, are carrying havoc and desolation, misery and want, into the habitations of those who were once crowned with abundance, and rejoicing in the smiles of quietude and peace; it becomes the imperious duty of those, who are beholding at a distance, the raging of the elements, not only to feel for their suffering fellow mortals, it also becomes them to act: and to act too with effect. Such a scene brethren is now witnessed among us. Added to the unusual inclemency of the season, and the general want of business among the lower orders of society; Almighty God, during the passed year, as a punishment to our polluted world has been sweeping down the fruits of the earth with the besom of destruction, so that many who were once, if not in a state of affluence, yet blessed with a competency of this world's goods, may now be seen, strolling the streets, pale with disease—emaciated with hunger; shivering in the winter's blast and with faltering accents, imploring the charity of their more favored neighbors.

To relieve, in some degree these multiplied calamities, these penetrating woes, which one would be induced to suppose were sufficient to melt a heart of adamant; a society has been formed: not like those transitory associations, esta-

blished for the promotion of sensual pleasure, without being designed for any valuable purpose. No brethren; constituted of the fairest as well as the most interesting portion of God's creation—the younger females of your community; its object is noble and benevolent—its action interesting, and lovely. Its name, I need hardly tell you, is the same as that which I have taken for my text: and from its name it will be easy for you to deduce its object,—*useful*: useful to themselves, and useful to others.

The spirit of the living God moved upon them. Being made sensible that like, the servant of Philemon, they had robbed their master—robbed God, of much of that precious time which he had given them for valuable purposes, and that to escape his observation they had run far away from him; being made sensible of this, by that same spirit which wrought upon the heart of Onesimus of old, they were like him solicitous to return; and uniting on some common principles to be useful to themselves and useful to others.

But whence were these principles to be deduced? Not from the boasted speculations of the Heathen philosophers, or from the more subtle metaphysics of modern infidels: no, brethren they are only to be found, in this book of God. This was consulted—this was chosen. Happy selection! Blessed choice! It was this, that altered the views of the servant of Philemon—this, that made him glitter in the church as a star of superior lustre:—this, that made him a triumphant martyr to the cause of his Redeemer: and it is upon this circumstance, my young friends, of your being guided by its sacred principles, that I am resting all my hopes, not only of your being extensively useful, but of the very existence of your institution. It is the very foundation of your society—let this be removed, and the superstructure which you have built upon it will sooner or later, crumble into ruins. I entreat you, therefore, as you value your institution—as you value the important, the benevolent objects it embraces, never to let go from you this precious treasure—this book of God. Cling to it, as your last resource—your best your only hope and you cannot fail of obtaining the object which you have in contemplation.

Christian brethren, do you consider it a duty to read the word of God—to meditate upon its precious truths—to chant the anthem of praise to your Redeemer, to meet frequently to converse on those subjects, which are full of everlasting interest! I know you do. And have you never felt your hearts melting within you, and the fire of divine love beginning to

kindle in your bosoms, while thus engaged? And do you not conceive it your duty to approve with your smiles and your benediction, a disposition of this description, wherever it may appear? Bless, then, with your encouragement, that institution, whose cause I am now pleading before you: for this is one of its principal objects.

Parents, when you look around upon that interesting group of flourishing immortals, which compose your domestic circle—those lovely children of your affection, do you not frequently feel your bosoms throbbing with painful anxiety for their future destiny? Is it not the ardent desire of your souls, your constant prayer to God, that they should grow, lovely as the tree by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf withers not?—that they cultivate among the endearing circle of their companions in early life the heavenly spirit of tenderness, benevolence, and affection—that spirit of love to one another, of industry, and of active humanity, which shall prepare them to go forth on the busy, tumultuous theatre, of active life, with usefulness and credit to themselves, and at the same time with much comfort and consolation to you? Yes, parents, if your hearts are not steeled to the calls of nature, I know that these feelings and these desires, are frequently passing in crowded succession through your agitated bosoms. Give then your countenance, your assistance, to an institution, which embrace this too, as one of its important objects.—This lovely spirit, which I pray God, they may not only ever cultivate, but for ever practice.

But even this is not all. No brethren, one other object still remains. One, if not more important, certainly in the present state of things, much more interesting. It is to relieve the urgent necessities of the suffering poor:—to gladden by their munificence the vale of poverty and woe. To affect this godlike purpose, they have hovered around like the angel of mercy,—they have penetrated the cheerless abodes of the wretched. They have made themselves acquainted with misery, and want, and woe. They have witnessed scenes, which were sufficient to make the hardy spirit of the masculine to sink within him:—scenes in the delineation of which I find my powers of description utterly fail me. Go with these messengers of mercy—enter with them the comfortless habitations of the indigent—habitations which are unable to defend them from the chill blasts of the winters tempest which is howling around their

dwellings. Behold the wretched mother stretched perhaps on a bed of straw—pale with hunger and shivering in the breeze—listen to the heart rending cries of her half famished freezing offspring:—do this, and your feelings will tell you more forcibly than I am able to do, how inadequate language is, to pourtray the miseries to which many of our fellow beings are subjected.

Brethren, I am not dealing to you in fancy. Did I suppose for a single moment, that I was placing before you a picture, which has no existence, but in the colourings of an ardent fancy, I should certainly hold my peace. But I have no such expectation,—no such belief. It is my firm conviction, my deliberate opinion, that much of the misery which exists around us has never yet been brought to light: that many are suffered to pine and want, and perhaps die, for want of some angel hand to minister to their necessities. The society which has this day been brought to your notice, has already done much: much to merit the gratitude, not only of the individuals benefitted, but of the community at large. They have taken the heavy burthen of searching the abodes of wretchedness, and of clothing the naked, on themselves. And they have discharged their duty faithfully.

With the proceeds of your former bounty, added to their own, they have with their own hands made more than three hundred and sixty garments. With these many individuals have been clothed, who must otherwise have suffered, perhaps perished by the inclemency of the season. Besides these, some have been supplied with the precious word of life. This is being useful on Gospel principles. Were it necessary to adduce proof of what I have asserted, it would be easy for me to appeal to facts. Yonder are many of the individuals, whose present appearance can testify that I have not exaggerated in my statement. With these facts before you brethren, you may rest assured that your bounty has not been misapplied. And while they continue to hold the word of God in their hands as the ruling principle of their actions, you have a sure pledge that it never will.

My dear young friends, it is far from my purpose on the present occasion to flatter, or to elevate you in your own estimation, by recounting what you have done. Standing as I now do in the presence of the Searcher of hearts, before whom I must give an account of this day's service, it would ill become me to degrade the sacred desk by descending to the

low arts of flattery. No, I must tell you plainly, there is a weight of responsibility resting upon you which might almost make the shoulders of angels bend. To you it belongs to see that the poor and the needy suffer not. The eyes of the public are upon you, they expect much, they demand much of you. Disappoint not their expectations—shew by your conduct, that you are fully equal to the arduous task you have undertaken. Let not difficulties affright—let not scenes of misery and distress deter you from your duty. Go on in your labours of love; and may the God of everlasting peace and mercy be ever with you, and for ever bless you.

But brethren, without your aid they can go no farther. Their funds are already exhausted. Though much has been done much yet remains to be done. The cry of the needy is still loud and pressing—the chill blasts of winter are still howling around their dreary habitations. Mothers are still weeping for their children—children are still shivering in the icy breeze. Something must be done. The cries of the helpless sufferers continually sigh upon the breeze and linger on the ear. They grow louder and louder—they pierce the heavens,—they penetrate the sanctuary of the living God—they demand of you brethren to come and help them. And what shall I tell them? I know you have already done much, much I trust, which is already noted down on the records of eternity. And are your tender mercies all exhausted? Have you not a single tear yet to shed over the wants of suffering humanity; a small pittance yet to bestow? And must I go back to them with this chilling message? Tell them that the sources of their comfort are dried up, that there is no more for them to expect? Must I tell the wretched mother, whose countenance, is already beginning to brighten with a gleam of hope, to go back into her comfortless hovel, to take back with her, her shivering offspring, and suffer, and pine, and die; for there is no more help for them? No brethren, I cannot, I dare not go back with this cheerless, this freezing message. And your countenances tell me that I shall not.

I have discharged my duty. Remember the eyes of God are upon you. His ministering Angels are in this assembly. Hovering around they mark your charity and carry the amount to the courts of Heaven. Let it be such, as not to make you blush, when you come, in the presence of an assembled universe, to stand before its tremendous bar. And may God of his infinite mercy add his blessing for Christ's sake. *Amen.*