
A DAY WITH THE SHAKERS.

BETWEEN two and three miles northward of the centre village in the township of Harvard, Massachusetts, the traveller discerns a rustic guide board, on which is inscribed "To the Shaker Village." Uncouth name for any association of serious people seriously to adopt; yet we never hear them called otherwise. The Quakers, we all know, denominate themselves "the Society of Friends," but these people seem to have no other appellation besides this grotesque one thus placed at the road's head: Possibly, however, the town erected the board, and they did not originate the popular and current designation of themselves.

At about half a mile up this road we arrive at three or four houses of no very attractive exterior, with a large stone barn, having very much the appearance of a prison, which for the animals contained therein probably it is. At this station, which is the probationary village for such persons as propose to join the family, the visitor is met by some of the brethren, amongst whom will be found one of superior intelligence, who in good temper answers questions to which he has probably responded some hundreds of times before. Most likely the conversation turns upon the subject of self-denial, and thence naturally to their especial instance of it, that is to say abstinence from marriage. Of him you may learn that the number in the family is about two hundred persons, of whom only thirty-eight are under sixteen years of age, and not one is younger than four; that they did not settle here from any choice of this rough and sterile domain of about fifteen hundred acres, but because their founder, Ann Lee, received from the persons

who resided here during her brief earthly sojourn that cordial support and sympathy which frequently attends the career of the pious.

Passing this group of buildings, on a turn of the road to the left hand over a broad slab of rock, a street of houses is presented to the view. Some of these buildings are small and old; some are large and new. Many active laborers are in the fields and gardens, and improvements are carried on with vigor; but there is much to be done, by reason of the original rudeness of this spot, in order to bring the external appearances to a like elevation with that which common report has assigned to other stations. The orchards and gardens are the most striking achievements, and this family trades extensively in seeds.

No formal introduction is required; on the contrary, there is a general disposition on the part of both the more intelligent men and women to enter into free conversation at once upon their distinguishing practice of self-sacrifice. On the subject of abstinence from outward marriage they are as lively and energetic as recent converts. It reigns so monarchically in their hearts that they have always a stirring topic whereon to speak, and an exalting object for which to act. So far from being lifeless or indifferent about other persons, they seem to be fully aware that unless fresh comers are gathered in from the world at large, their family must decline gradually to total extinction. There is, therefore, great promptness manifested in laying their arguments before sincere inquirers, although they are not so zealous as to send forth especial missionary brethren. Words alone they may perhaps consider would be fruitless; while in conjunction with a life fully realizing them, they become almost irresistible. The family being thus sustained by the addition of convinced minds, and not by the imposition of educative habits, there will probably be ever found a degree of animation and heartfelt zeal unknown amongst other religious orders.

Our business being the purchase of a few seeds, and the gardener being occupied out of doors, the trading agent attended us to the store, and supplied the articles with an activity and business intelligence, which prove him qualified to conduct any such transactions they may have with the old world. Their trade, he informed us, amounts generally

to the large sum of ten thousand dollars a year. For persons of simple habits, desirous of relief from circumstances morally depressive, this is far too great an involvement in money affairs; but it seems to grow out of their peculiar position, and the want of true simplicity in many particulars. Their estate does not at present produce a full supply of bread-corn; most of the members, except the children, consume flesh-meat; much milk is used; and the aged amongst them still drink tea, or coffee, and the like. For these reasons some of their produce has to be exchanged, which occasions considerable traffic. To provide for their wants they also are extensive manufacturers of various clothing and other fabrics, and have to buy raw material to work upon, as well as to sell the goods when finished. These proceedings require more extensive interchanges of money, and more frequent intercourse with the world, than seems compatible with a serene life.

Yet their life is serene. The repose, quiet, and cleanliness reigning throughout the establishment are indeed as remarkable as attractive. As a retreat for the thoughtful or poetic mind, it seems most desirable. You could there "walk gowned," conscious of feelings as reverential as those which pervade the bosom of the worshipper when he enters the ancient cathedral. Nor is the superstition there, nor the outward devotion which results from the artistic effects of architecture, painting, music, and the rest. Of these they can boast none. As they have built several spacious houses for themselves, their idea has necessarily been expressed by an architecture of some character, yet wanting in most or all of those artifices which distinguish edifices erected by other religionists. The building last erected is large and plain. Externally it has somewhat the appearance of a school-house or church. Internally, however, it is divided into separate apartments, and is of several stories. Corridors in the middle, with rooms on each side, keep the whole well-ventilated, light and cheerful. The stairs and most of the floors being covered with a homemade carpet, the foot-tread is inaudible. At this house visitors are received and entertained; and, if they remain during a meal time, here take their repast; the accommodations being reported too small to permit even all the inmates to eat together. The internal fittings of the new

house are of the most comfortable kind. Window-sashes, spring-blinds, closets, &c. are of the best workmanship and most convenient contrivances for endurance. The joinery is not painted, but varnished slightly, so that it can be cleaned with facility; and the only objection seems to be the use of close stoves instead of open fire-places. The furniture is not home-made, but is wrought mostly in a more ancient fashion still common to the country, and much more cheap than elegant or luxurious.

Here we enjoyed an animated conversation with several of the brethren and sisters, or, as they would say, men and women. They are faithful to the precept of "Aye" and "Nay" in their replies, and are as new and fresh in mind as we may suppose the Society of Friends were within sixty years of their founder's time.

It appears that in consequence of the number of visitors who came to their weekly worship, with other than devotional feelings, they have ceased to permit any chance of interruption, so that we had no optical evidences of their peculiar religious modes and forms. But their books, of which we purchased copies, show that they advocate dancing as a religious exercise, claiming for it the same virtues and station which are by most churches awarded to singing. Their scriptural confirmations of its propriety strongly fortify them in the practice, though they admit, that what was originally an involuntary emotion is now repeated as a voluntary duty.

The clearest book they have published is entitled "A Summary View of the Millennial Church, or United Society of Believers, (commonly called Shakers,) comprising the rise, progress, and practical order of the Society;" printed at Albany in 1823. This work, in the first place, reveals their legitimate title; and secondly, narrates the origin and progress of the Society under the auspices of ANN LEE, who was born at Manchester in England in the year 1736, arrived in America in 1774, and collected the first family in 1787, at New Lebanon, near Albany, in the State of New-York. Notwithstanding the difficult passage they had to steer during the revolutionary war, so as to avoid the charge of partisanship, and subsequently the still more limitary effect of their doctrine and lives, the number of believers in all the States of the Union is considered now to be over six thousand.

Their theological system is strictly scriptural. At the same time they are not mere verbalists. They say that "nothing but *the real* and abiding presence of *Christ*, by the indwelling of his spirit, ever did, or ever could *save one soul*. Such as reject *Christ*, and take their own wisdom for their guide, never were, nor ever can be saved. And in no better situation are they who profess faith in an absent Saviour, who believe that Christ was once upon earth, but is now departed to some remote and unknown heaven, where it is impossible for the weak capacities of mortals to reach him." They look upon Ann Lee as the female principle or supplementary nature to Jesus Christ, who was the male complement, and that she initiated the second advent, of which this church exhibits the progress.

As Christ did not marry, neither will true believers who really "take up the cross and follow him." The number of scripture texts in favor of a celibate life, quoted in this book, is much greater, as well as much more decisive than ordinary readers suppose; and we do not hesitate to say, they have strong authority on their side. At the same time, there is nothing gloomy in their general doctrines, nor monkish in their tone of mind. They have not yet banished all the lusts of the table, though these are evidently the excitements to other lusts which they find it to be their principal cross to restrain. They still believe in the perpetual battle against this desire, and scarcely contemplate a life on earth which shall be above this temptation in the same degree as the really sober man is superior to the allurements of the glass. Though they do say (p. 99) "The doctrine of *christian sinners*, or the idea of christians living in sin, so strenuously advocated by many, is utterly inconsistent with every attribute of God. All doctrines, which imply that real christians cannot live without sin, are inconsistent with the attributes of power and goodness, and indeed with every divine attribute. 'Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not; whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, nor known him.'"

In this book all the leading theological doctrines are ably discussed on scriptural and rational grounds. They esteem the Adamic fall to consist in a yielding to sexual temptation. "The temptation was first addressed to the mind: 'Ye shall be as Gods;' and thence applied to the animal

propensities, which were inferior to the rational powers. The faculties of the soul, being superior to those of the body, ought to have had the government. But when the man's animal sensations were addressed, and excited by the temptation, though he possessed a governing power in the faculties of his soul; yet he gave up that power, and gave loose to his animal desires, and under their excitement yielded to the temptation. This occasioned his fall; and hence the loss which ensued." p. 107. A doctrine which coincides with that held by most of the ancient philosophers, as narrated by Jamblichus in his work on the Mysteries. p. 250. "There is a time when we become wholly soul, are out of the body, and sublimely revolve on high, in conjunction with all the immaterial Gods. And there is also a time when we are bound in the testaceous body, are detained by matter, and are of a corporeal-formed nature. Again, therefore, there will be a two-fold mode of worship. For one mode, indeed, will be simple, incorporeal, and pure from all generation; and this mode pertains to undefiled souls. But the other is filled with bodies, and everything of a material nature, and is adapted to souls which are neither pure nor liberated from all generation."

The believers have undoubtedly stronger ground than conjecture for affirming that the government of the animal propensities is what is signified by the command to abstain from the good-and-evil-knowledge tree. "As the power of generation was given to man solely for the purpose of procreation, and not for the gratification of his animal nature, the dignity of his creation required that he should maintain a greater degree of order and purity in the work of generation than was required of the inferior part of the creation, which was governed by the law of nature. This was the more essential, as the offspring of man were to be rational and immortal souls. The power was entrusted to the living and rational soul of man; and the command of God was sufficient to maintain that power so long as the soul maintained its obedience. This was the point of trial; on this depended the state and character of his offspring: for like begets like; and if parents are alienated from God, they will of course produce an alienated offspring." p. 124.

Without resorting to repetitions, which, in their disconnection might be more tiresome than convincing, it is not

possible to do justice to their whole argument. In both the mystic and actual senses there is much truth in the doctrine of the Female Messiah. As the emblem and personification of Moral Love, Woman must ere long give the ruling tone to society; and Love itself, as the Spirit substance, must rule in the human heart. So the woman-seed shall bruise the serpent-head.

Nor are their arguments directed against union under all circumstances. On the contrary they affirm the generative law in terms which can scarcely be gainsaid. "The original law of nature was given of God, and was very good in its place and order, and might have remained so till repealed by the Lawgiver, had it not been violated, and basely corrupted: and that it still continues to be violated in the most shameful manner, has been sufficiently proved. Therefore, those who still plead the law of nature, or the law of God, to justify sexual coition, under a pretended necessity of maintaining the work of generation, *ought first to examine their secret motives in it*; and if they are able to lay the propensities of lust entirely aside, and enter upon that work without the influence of any other motive than solely that of obeying the will of God, in the propagation of a legitimate offspring, to be heirs of the kingdom of heaven, *then they are able to fulfill the law of nature.*" p. 145.

"It may be proper to remark, that it is not the work of generation, in itself considered, in the order of nature, which is condemned; but it is that libidinous and lawless passion which was infused by the serpent at the beginning, and by which the work of generation has been, and still continues to be so basely corrupted; it is that which has filled the earth with abominations, and that is the object of condemnation. If that cursed nature could be *entirely purged out of the natural man*, so that his feelings could be wholly governed by the will of God, he would feel a very different sensation in this act, and would be in no danger of violating the true order of nature by it." p. 146.

To literary minds the Shaker principles may present little of an attractive nature; as to the artist their external appearances may indicate but a moderate love for the beautiful. Yet the truth must be affirmed that in the absence of much literature, of the fine arts, and of those studies which are

thought to be essential in human progress, they seem to be far on the road, if they have not already attained the solution of a chaste, scientific, and self-sustained life. It was a notable saying of their mother Ann, "Put your hands to work, and give your hearts to God." Here is no provision made for the disposal of the intellect. Yet they are neither void of common sense, nor of refinement. Their simplicity has not descended to rigid forms, nor to ungracious deportment. For economy they have adopted one fashion in the cut of their garments, though at first glance it is scarcely observable. The men do not disuse the ordinary courtesies of life. They are not afraid of nodding their heads to familiar acquaintances, or of bending their bodies to receive the stranger. This flexibility in behavior is attributable to their recognition of one principle, which in theological parties is as rare as it is beautiful; that is to say, the principle of progress. From what has been quoted above regarding the eternal presence of Christ as the living Spirit, we are prepared for this result. But then, what sect is there which has not put forth, in its origin, a similar declaration? And how soon it has fallen to a verbal dogma! When the Quakers were no older as a sect than the Shakers now are, they too were an animated, lively, spirit-moved party. By the time the Shakers are as aged, they may be as sepulchral and frigid; but from the essential nature and constitution of the society we have higher hopes. In fact it seems scarcely possible that a church, which, if it continue in existence at all, must be kept together by the addition of new and integrally convinced members, should ever fall into the melancholy mood which characterizes so many parties, who at their outset most efficiently proclaimed the Spirit's work in them. The union of the two sexes in government, in influence, in religion, in chaste celibacy, is an achievement worthier of renown than many works of greater fame. The extent of its operation, and its important consequences, are yet but faintly discernible. It is also worthy of remark, that this most successful experiment of associate life, and community of property, was founded by A WOMAN.

Ann Lee seems to have had in her mind the true idea of a holy family; that of representing through the simplest domestic labors the most exalted spiritual sentiments. In

speaking to a spiritual sister she gave the following counsel: "Be faithful to keep the gospel; be neat and industrious; keep your family's clothes clean and decent; see that your house is kept clean; and your victuals prepared in good order; that when the brethren come home from hard work, they can bless you, and eat their food with thankfulness, without murmuring, and be able to worship God in the beauty of holiness. Watch and be careful; don't speak harshly, nor cast reflections upon them; but let your words be few, and seasoned with grace." p. 29. And her brother, though he had been bred in the rough school of the royal *Oxford Blues*, was so meliorated and humanized by her spirit, that he was wont to reprove the believers for walking about in a careless, undignified manner, as if regardless of the divine presence; and would say to them, "In your intercourse you should salute or pass each other like angels."

Like the Roman Catholic church, this people requires of any one joining the family, that he or she should consecrate all property to the divine service; but there is no stipulation for the bringing in of any wealth; and not many persons rich in this world's goods have joined them. Although they have a noviciate process, their family is evidently no place for those who are merely speculating on the practicability of association. Unless the heart and hands are given up, a true union is impossible; and where those are really and sincerely devoted, wealth cannot be retained. The soul determined to a holy life, as soon as rationally convinced of the stability of the associates, does not wait to count coins, nor does it stipulate for a possible self-renegation.

The world as yet but slightly appreciates the domestic and humane virtues of this recluse people; and we feel that in a record of associative attempts for the actualization of a better life, their designs and economies should not be omitted, especially as, during their first half century, a remarkable success has been theirs. A further proof that whatsoever is sown in piety, must, under the sun of Divine grace, ripen to an abundant harvest.