

CHEAP REPOSITORY.

THE
HISTORY
OF
DILIGENT DICK;

OR,
Truth will out though it be hid in a Well.



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The HISTORY, &c.

A false witness shall not go unpunished, and he who speaketh lies shall perish.

DON'T be frightened, Reader! Although I set out with a text, I am not going to preach a sermon, but to tell a story. On the right side of Marsh-moor common, and not more than five hundred yards out of the turnpike road, stood a lone cottage, inhabited by one Richard Rogers, a day-labourer, commonly called DILIGENT DICK. Though poor, he was as much noted for his honesty as for the care and industry by which he brought up a large family in a very decent manner. About fifteen years ago, in the month of January, there suddenly fell a deep snow, attended by such a high wind, that many travellers lost their lives in it. When all on a sudden, as Rogers and his family were crouding round a handful of fire to catch a last heat before they went to-bed, they heard a doleful cry of help! help! for God's sake help! —Up started Rogers in an instant, when clapping the end of a farthing candle into a broken horn lantern, and catching up his staff, out he sallied,

directing his steps towards the spot from whence the cries came: at length in one of the sand-pits he found a gentleman who had fallen from his horse, and was nearly buried in the snow. Rogers, though with much difficulty, at length dragged him out, and after securing the horse, conveyed them both home.

The gentleman appeared elderly, and seemed almost perished with cold; for a long time he was quite speechless, his jaws appeared locked, and it was only by inward groans they could perceive he had any remains of life in him, so benumbed and stiffened was he with cold; after they had rubbed his limbs for some time before the fire, the gentleman by degrees recovered himself, and began to thank Rogers and his wife, whom he saw busied about him, as well as his children. "Sir," said Betty Rogers, "Although we be poor in pocket, we may nevertheless be kind in heart." Here the stranger, after fetching a deep sigh, said, "if his life were granted him, he hoped it would be in his power to reward them for their kindness." Rogers replied, "that what he had done for him he would have done for his worst enemy." Here the gentleman groaned heavily, saying he had been long sick himself, and that he could not enough admire the healthy looks of Rogers's children.

"Blessed be God, Sir," said Roger, "Although my family is numerous, I never paid a shilling for doctor's stuff in my life, nor do I even know the price of a coffin; if my wealth is small, my wants are few, and though I know I am a sinner and need daily repentance, yet my conscience is sound, for I have knowingly done wrong to no man, nor would I forfeit my good name, Sir, to become the

richest man in Old England. I am not covetous of wealth, Sir, since I have seen how little peace of mind they often enjoy who possess it; the honest man, Sir, sleeps soundly on the hardest bed, whilst he who has made too much haste to be rich, may lie down on the softest bed with an aching heart, but shall not be able to find rest." All this while Betty Rogers sat puffing and blowing the fire with a pair of broken-nosed bellows in order to boil her kettle, to make the gentleman a dish of her coarse bohea tea, as she had no spirits or liquor of any kind except spring water to offer him; she also toasted a bit of bread, though she had no butter to rub over it; yet she hoped the gentleman would excuse it, since many of the farmers were so extortionate in their price of butter and cheese, that some of their labourers live for the greater part of their time on bread only or a few potatoes.

Here the gentleman attempted to partake of Betty's tea and toast, when all at once he began to tremble all over so exceedingly, that he begged she would set it down for the present, for if he was to attempt to swallow it, he was certain it would choke him. "It is but cold comfort to be sure, Sir," said Rogers, "we have to offer you; but nevertheless we must hope you will take the will for the deed. I suppose, Sir, you are very rich, and yet you now see, that all the wealth in the world cannot help a man in certain situations. I had a pretty education, Sir, and I remember when I was a boy at school to have read the history of a great king, who when harrassed by the enemy, and being overcome with thirst, was thankful to a poor soldier who brought him a draught of cold water in his helmet, which he drank off greedily, saying, that amidst all his

pomp he had never tasted such luxury as that cup of water yielded him. So you see, Sir, what strange ups-and-downs there are in life; therefore people of all degrees should be careful to keep pride out of their hearts, since the most prosperous man to-day, may be thankful for the poor man's assistance to-morrow. "And after all" cried Betty Rogers, "high and low, rich and poor, should pray daily for God's grace, since that alone can give peace to their poor souls when the hour of affliction cometh. But bless me," cried she, clasping her hands, "what shall we do, our last inch of candle is burnt out?" "Then, said Rogers," we must content ourselves, my Betty, with passing the rest of the night in the dark." The gentleman said he must be content to do as they did. "Many is the dark night, Sir," said Richard, "have I sat by my dame's bed-side when she has been sick or lying-in, endeavouring to make up to her in kindness what I could not provide for her in comforts, when I have not had the least glimmering of light, but what came from the twinkling stars through our tattered casement.

"Amidst all our poverty, Sir, we have ever been the happiest pair in each other. It is a brave thing, Sir, to be able, by the grace of God, to drive sin out of the cottage when poverty enters in; for sin is the father of shame. A man, Sir, amidst the extreme poverty, yet may stand high in the favour of God, by patience, prayer, and a hearty faith in his Redeemer."

Here the stranger appeared under very great distress both of body and mind, he shivered all over as if he had an ague fit upon him, and by a little blast, which was just then lighted up, they perceived he looked as pale as death; they begged him

to lie down on their bed, saying, "it was very clean, though it was ill provided with sheets and blankets." O my good people, cried the gentleman, your goodness will be the death of me; the kindness of your hearts proves to me the unkindness of my own: No, go you to-bed, and let me sit here till morning. That Rogers said they could not do. The gentleman then replied, he should be glad if Rogers would give him a little history of himself and family to beguile the time.

"That I will do most readily, Sir," said he, if *so be* it will oblige you in the least.—My name is Rogers, although my neighbours are pleased to call me DILIGENT DICK. I have a wife and seven children; I rise with the lark and lie down with the lamb. I never spend an idle penny or an idle moment, though my family is numerous, my children were never a burden to me. That good woman there, Sir," pointing to his wife, "puts her hand to the labouring oar: she brings up our children at home in such a sober industrious manner, that our neighbours, as soon as they are capable of earning a penny, are glad to take them off our hands. I am proud to say, Sir, they have no little pilfering tricks, as many children have. 'Train up a child in the way he should go,' is our way Sir, and I am certain both my wife and I have felt the benefit of the text, for our children are kind and affectionate towards each other, dutiful to us their parents, and obliging and civil to their employers. Ah, Sir, the richest man in England is not happier than I am, when I return home of an evening, wearied by the heat and labour of the day, to be received with looks of kindness by my wife, as she is preparing our frugal supper, whilst

two or three of my little babies climb my knees to fondle me round the neck." Again the traveller groaned piteously ; but Rogers went on. " I was born to a pretty fortune, Sir ; but by the villainy of my father's brother I lost my inheritance. My uncle, Charles Rogers, through the indulgence of his mother, proved to be a very malicious child, and as he grew up to man's estate, the faults of the child became hardened vices in the man, insomuch that his wicked behaviour broke his mother's heart. My own dear mother, Sir, like the parents of Samuel, taught me betimes to fear the Lord ; yet my grandfather was so much offended at my father's marrying her, that he made his will, and cut him off with a shilling. He and my poor mother died within a twelvemonth of each other, and left me penniless by the time all their debts were paid. I was then about twelve years of age, and my Betty's father kindly took me to live with him. He soon received a message from my grandfather, with a present of twenty guineas to pay for my board, saying, he was very ill, and that he would send for me when he was better, the next news I heard of him was that he was dead, and though he had promised to make a will in my favour, yet none was to be found, although one of his old servants declared he had signed a great sheet of parchment, which a lawyer had been writing by my grandfather's bed-side. Every body now judged my uncle Charles very hardly, as having made away with this last will, because he brought forward the old one, wherein my grandfather had left his whole property to him. Some kind friends of my father wishing to see justice done by me, commenced an action against both him and the lawyer, who was known

to be a rogue, and ready to do any dirty work for money.

“The trial was brought on at the next assizes, when my uncle employed such arts in securing the witnesses, that a verdict was given against me. After some months, however, my uncle sent me twenty guineas, that I might be put apprentice to a carpenter; but expected he should never be troubled about me again. Accordingly I was bound out; but my master proved one of those negligent tradesmen who loved his ease better than his work: by neglecting his business, his business began to neglect him. He broke at length for a considerable sum of money, and was thrown into prison, where he died soon after of the jail distemper, so at the end of the third year of my apprenticeship, I was once more left to seek for bread. I returned again to my Betty’s father, who got me employment under his master. I was about one and twenty when I married, and then I and my wife followed my master’s son into this country, who had an estate left him, and with him I have worked ever since, and with truth I can say, I have never received an unkind word from him, for he never saw me drunk, not even at sheep-sheering or at harvest home. My Betty’s pious meekness, Sir, has sweetened all my toil, whilst the dutiful behaviour of my children has fulfilled every wish of my heart. Whether my cruel uncle be dead or living I know not; but be it as it may, I do not envy him his ill-gotten wealth, and I can only pray that he may repent him of his sins, before sickness brings him to a death bed; for it is a horrible thing, Sir, to have the conscience racked with despair when the body is afflicted with pain.”

“ Bless me, Richard,” cried Betty Rogers, “ you are talking on, and on, whilst I am sure the poor gentleman is going into a fit.” The gentleman at that instant gave a deep groan and would have fallen from his chair, if Rogers had not caught him in his arms, whilst his wife snatching up the little mug of tea, which she still kept warm in the ashes, she put it to the stranger’s lips, begging him to take a sip, as she was sure it would do him good. Whilst her husband, on the other hand, begged him to eat a bit of the toast. The gentleman could but just make shift to say, “ My good people you are too kind to me.” “ Not at all, Sir,” said Rogers, “ we do no more for you, than we would for our worst enemy.” “ O God,” cried the traveller, “ what will become of me? My sight fails me, my flesh trembles, and my joints ach, I freeze and burn at the same moment.

“ Poor dear gentleman!” said Betty Rogers, wiping her eyes, “ I am afraid he is going light-headed, do pray, Sir, drink a drop more of the tea, and eat a bit of the toast also,” answered Richard. “ I dare not taste it my good friends,” replied the gentleman, “ for I feel as if it would choke me were I to attempt it; but tell me, I pray, is there not somewhere a text of Scripture which says, ‘ If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for, in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. O Rogers, Rogers, thou wilt say so indeed, when thou art told I am thy wicked uncle Charles.”

Here Rogers and his wife had nearly swooned away with astonishment. “ Then I am heartily glad to see you uncle,” cried Rogers, “ and if you have really done me wrong I forgive you with all my

soul, as I hope to be forgiven myself." Here Mr. Rogers's grief appeared so great, he seemed almost beside himself. "But do not be surpris'd," cried he, as soon as he could speak, "to see me here; this is the second attempt I have made, Rogers, to visit thy humble dwelling; but more of that hereafter;" in about a quarter of an hour, Mr. Rogers, after shedding bitter tears, spoke as follows :

"The world, Richard, has long believed me to be a very happy man, seeing that I possessed an abundance of the good things of this world, but what man ever yet was happy, who carried secret guilt in his bosom? Thy grandfather, on his death-bed, became duly sensible of his unforgiving spirit towards thy poor father, for no other crime, had he committed, but his having married a woman who brought him no money; he therefore resolv'd that the last business of his life should be doing an act of justice towards thee, his only son, accordingly he sent for his Attorney, made a new will, bequeathing thee that property which he would have given thy father had he been living, he also desired much to see thee, which I took especial care to prevent, fearing thy youth and innocence would win upon his love. After his decease, by the advice, and with the assistance of his rogue of an Attorney, we burnt my father's last will, and produced that which he had made many years before, wherein he had cut thy father off with a shilling. The deed was no sooner done, than I felt, as it were, all the torments of hell raging in my soul, it was done at the very moment his people were laying my aged father's body in the coffin." Here Mr. Rogers grew so faint he could not go on.

“Merciful Heaven,” cried Richard, with hands and eyes up lifted, “how covetousness hardens the heart of man! what a safe-guard has my poverty been to me! riches might have ensnared my soul too.” As soon as Mr. Rogers could speak he went on. “Thou hast just mentioned, Richard, the trial that was brought forward after my father’s decease, respecting his will, when the Attorney whom I was to pay five hundred pounds for the villainous part he had acted, swore he never had made a second will for my father, and I swore to the same effect; yes, Richard, I swore upon the holy Bible, which pronounces a deadly curse on him who swears falsely; yea, I called on that eternal God to witness a lie, before whom I must shortly be judged for it, and now my grey hairs are brought to the brink of the grave, I begin to feel, that the sting of Death is Sin; very miserable has been my life, and very terrible no doubt will be my death. Being now in possession of a clear four hundred pounds a year, I began to fancy all things would go prosperously and swimmingly on, I bought, and I sold, and no man’s traffick seemed to turn to better account; but no success in life, Richard, could blunt the sting of guilt within me; when I laid me down to rest at night I feared to trust myself to sleep, lest I should betray my secret, and my very dreams became so disturbed, that the servants would often hear my screams at the other end of the house. One night I dreamt I was going to be executed for destroying a will, and the next I fancied I was going to be transported for perjury. All my neighbours believed me to be a happy man, only because they saw me a prosperous one. My covetous desires were never satisfied, and whilst I went on heaping up guinea upon

guinea, my mind was hourly afflicted with the dread of poverty. My wife all of a sudden grew melancholy, and by an accident she fell into the pond, and was drowned; when my son came of age I settled him on the estate, which my father in his will had left to thee; he was a dissolute young man, and coming home one night very much intoxicated with liquor, he fell across the bed with a lighted candle in his hand, which instantly set fire to the curtains, and he perished in the flames, one of my daughters turned out very vicious, and the other died of a broken heart from the cruel usage of her husband. Besides all these trials, I had another very severe one from the Attorney, who was always racking me for money, and telling me he would turn King's evidence, and impeach me, if ever I refused him. At length, without a moment given him for repentance, he was suddenly carried off by a paralytic stroke. My spirits began to revive after his death, as my crime now was known only to myself: but peace can never dwell in the guilty bosom. I left off going to church, for there my condemnation stared me full in the face. The Ten Commandments were written in golden letters on each side of the Altar, then my own wicked conscience would whisper me, how many of those sacred commands I had broken, I had taken the holy name of God in vain, I had prophaned the Sabbath, I had been undutiful to my parents, I HAD BORNE FALSE WITNESS AGAINST MY NEIGHBOUR." At length, however, so grievously burdened was my conscience I resolved occasionally to attend church, hoping it would be a kind of sponge to rub out some of my sins. One Sunday I re-

member our parson told us in his sermon there can be no real repentance for sin, without forsaking it, adding moreover, that if any of his congregation, had defrauded his neighbour of aught, he entreated them, if ever they hoped their souls would find mercy in the day of grace, that they should make restitution, before death should cut them off from the land of the living, since there was no repentance in the grave.

These words so worked upon my mind, that I fell sick, and during my illness, I called on Heaven to witness, that if life were granted me, I would restore to thee what I had so unjustly kept from thee; but as my health returned, so did my good resolutions vanish away again, I cheated myself with the thought that I might yet enjoy life many years, thus I went on till the restless workings of my conscience almost overpowered me, and having enquired out the place of thy abode, mounted my horse and set out, with the resolution to discover the whole history of my villainy to thee; but when I came within sight of thy cottage, I found my principles were not strong enough to confess myself a rogue before thee, I turned my horse about, and went home again. I next took to hard drinking to stifle reflection, but all would not do, for still the gnawings of a guilty conscience devoured me; as my health declined, the stronger the fear of death came upon me. Again I resolved once more to go in search of thee, and earnestly did I pray to God to assist my endeavours, and the nearer I approached to thy little dwelling, the more was my courage strengthened to proceed. The sudden

fall of snow coming on was the cause of my being benighted, and missing my way when I fell into the pit; but ah, Richard, it seems, as if Heaven had appointed thee to preserve my life in this world, and my soul from destruction in the next, by pointing out to me the only path in which a penitent sinner can tread with safety. It is not for mortal man, Richard, to tell what agony of mind I have endured this night: thy kindness and that of thy wife nearly overcame me, and I the less feared to make a discovery of myself to thee, when I found every action of thy daily life was governed by the principles of religion, since good men alone can heartily forgive their enemies.

“O Rogers! Rogers! how blest is thy condition, when compared with mine: if thou art poor, thou art honest; in addition to a quiet conscience, thou hast a healthful and happy family smiling around thee. I abound in wealth it is true; but my health is gone, I have lost my rest, and I carry in my bosom the sharp goadings of a wounded spirit which I am unable to bear.”

Here Mr. Rogers finished his truly melancholy history, at which both Rogers and his wife shed abundance of tears, and at the same time they did all in their power to comfort him. The next day Rogers attended his uncle home, when he sent for the clergyman of his parish, who was a very experienced christian, made a full confession of his guilt to him, hoping he would give him his best advice how to fit and prepare himself for another world. Mr. Rogers lived but a few weeks after this, and died full of horror at the sins of his past life.

How mysterious are the ways of Providence, who in an instant can bring the most secret plots to light, for truly the proverb says, "Truth will out, though it be hid in a well."

S.

THE END.

Next month will be published a Continuation of the History of Mr. Bragwell.

