

“Foolish Dick and His Song”

To those who knew him, and many, many in the west of England were thankful to have known him, this hymn seemed remarkably made. Nor was there a day through his somewhat lengthened life in which some stanza of it was not on his lips. “Foolish Dick,” people called him, and not without some share of reason. In early life he was quite retarded and unable to work unless with someone who could oversee his every deed. But he proved to be one of those whose history strikingly shows the quickening, expanding, and regulating power of vital religion on the human intellect even in its nearest approaches hopeless idiocy.

“Foolish Dick” was one morning on his way to the well for water, when an old Christian man who was leaning over the garden gate said, “So you are going to the well for water, Dick?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, Dick; the woman of Samaria found Jesus Christ at the well.”

“Did she, sire?”

“Yes, Dick.”

That was enough. A quickening thought had struck into his half-awakened mind. The thought worked; and when he came to the well, he said, within himself, but loud enough to be heard by his Saviour, “Why should not I find Jesus Christ at the well? Oh that I could find Him! Will He come to me?” Yes, his prayer was heard; and Dick returned bearing his full pitcher; but bringing in his heart, too, the joy of which Jesus said, “It shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.” From that hour, Dick left his watering-pot; and gave himself up to the work of telling his neighbors the story of his conversion at the well, and indeed to the work of preaching Christ, in his way, in discourses marked by strong sense, warm feeling, and stirring appeals to the sinner’s conscience and heart. Every faculty of his mind, and all the passions of his soul now seemed to unfold new powers and fresh life. He was verily born again. His memory soon showed marvelous power. To hear a chapter in the Bible, or a hymn read to him, was to know it, and to have power to reproduce it. His new gifts were used for Christ. He went forth as an itinerant evangelist; going without purse or script; and through a life-long pilgrimage round and round his native country, and sometimes over the Border, he went everywhere preaching Jesus. He never lacked food or raiment, and when he entered into rest many, many happy spirits hailed him as the instrument of their salvation from sin and death. He was indeed a pilgrim preacher, rude and unpolished, as some thought, but certainly taught of Christ. The “Pilgrim’s Hymn” was always in keeping from his lips. It was his favorite

hymn, and every home that welcomed him had its hearth cheered by his music; for he would sit and wave too and fro, and sing, in a way that set forth the elegant simplicity of the lines---

No foot of land do I possess,

No cottage in this wilderness;

A poor wayfaring man,

I lodge awhile in tents below;

Or gladly wander to and fro,

Till I my Canaan gain.

This was his song all through the land of his pilgrimage. And not long ago, followed by the blessings of his generation, the weary old pilgrim departed, to realize the full answer to his last stanza—

Now let the pilgrim's journey end;

Now, O Saviour, Brother, Friend,

Receive me to thy breast!