

“The Cottage Conversion” ~Leigh Richmond

As I journeyed late on a summer evening, meditating on the beauties of the prospect around me, while they gradually faded from my sight, through the approach of darkness—it grew suddenly quite gloomy, and a black cloud hanging over my head threatened a heavy shower of rain. The big drops began to fall, and an open shed, adjoining to a laborer's cottage, offering me a seasonable shelter.

The circumstance reminded me of the happy privilege of the believing sinner, who finds a refuge from the storm, and the blast of the terrible ones, in the love of his Redeemer, which prepares him "a covert from storm and from rain." I went in unperceived; the door of the cottage was half open, and I heard the voices of a poor man, his wife, and some children within.

I was hesitating whether to go into the house and make myself known, or to enjoy in solitude a meditation on the foregoing comparison, which my situation had brought to my mind, when these words, spoken in a calm and affectionate tone, struck me with mingled pleasure and surprise, and determined not to interrupt the conversation, which was as follows:

"Indeed, wife, you are in the wrong. Riches would never make us happier—so long as the Lord sees it good that we should be poor."

"Well," replied the wife, "I can see no harm in wishing for more money and better living, than we have at present. Other people have risen in the world; and why should not we? There's *neighbor Sharp*, who has done well for his family, and, for anything I can see, will be one of the richest farmers in the parish, if he lives. And every body knows, he was once as poor as we are—while you and I are laboring and toiling from morning to night, and can but just get enough to fill our children's mouths, and keep ourselves coarsely clothed, and hardly that."

"Wife," answered the man, "having food and clothing—let us therewith be content. And, if it pleases God that even these things should fall short, let us submit ourselves to God in patience and well-doing, for he gives us more than we deserve."

"There, now you have begun preaching again," said the woman; "you never give me an answer, but you must always go to your Bible to help you out!"

"And where can I go so well?" replied the husband. "Is it not God's own Word for our instruction?"

"Well, that may be, but I do not like so much of it," answered she.

"And I do not like so little of it, as I see and hear from you," returned the man.

"Why that book has taught me, that it is an honor and comfort to be a poor man; and by the blessing of the Spirit of God, I believe and feel it to be true. I have, through mercy, always been enabled to get the bread of *honest industry*, and so have you; and though our children feed upon brown bread, and we cannot afford to buy them fine clothes, like some of our vain neighbors, to pamper their pride with; yet, bless the Lord, they are as healthy and clean as any in the parish. Why then should you complain? Godliness with contentment is great gain."

"An honor and a comfort to be a poor man, indeed! What nonsense you talk! What sort of honor and comfort can that be? I am out of patience with you, man!" the wife sharply cried out.

"I can prove it," replied he.

"How?" returned his partner, in no very pleasant tone of voice.

"My dear," said the good man, "hear me quietly, and I will tell you. I think it an honor, and I feel it a comfort—to be in that very station of life which my Savior Jesus Christ was in before me. He did not come into the world as one who was rich and great—but as a poor man, who had nowhere to lay his head. I feel a *blessing* in my poverty, because Jesus, like me, was poor. Had I been a rich man, perhaps I would never have known nor loved him. 'For not many mighty, not many noble are called.' God's people are chiefly found among the poor ones of the world, and those who are despised. This makes my poverty—to be my *comfort*.

"Besides, has not God chosen the poor of this world—to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? This thought makes my poverty also to be my *honor*.

"Moreover, to the poor the gospel was and is preached, and to my heart's delight I find it to be true, every Sunday of my life. And is it not plain, all the neighborhood through, that while so many of our rich tradesmen and nobles are quite careless of their soul's salvation, or set their faces against the ways of God, and are dead to everything that is gracious and holy—that a great number of the poorest people are converted and live forever in heaven? I honor the rich for their *station*, but I do not envy them for their *possessions*. I cannot forget what Christ once said, 'How hard it is for those who have riches—to enter into the kingdom of God!'

"Oh! my dear wife, if you did but know how to set a right value upon the *precious promises* which God has made to the poor—how thankful would I be!

"The expectation of the poor shall not perish. He delivers the poor and needy. He has prepared of his goodness for the poor. The poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One. For he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich—not in gold, but in grace.

"These promises comfort my soul, and would make me happy—even if I were deprived of that which I now enjoy. I can trust my Savior for this world, as well as for the next. He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all—how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

"May the Lord in his mercy bless you, my dear Sarah, with the grace of a contented mind!"

Here the gracious man stopped—and whether affected by her husband's discourse, or by any other cause, I know not—but she made no reply. He then said, "Come, children, it is our time for rest; shut the door, and let us go to prayer."

"Forgive me," said I, laying hold of the door, as the child was obeying her father's orders, "if I ask permission to make one in your family devotions, before I travel homeward. I have heard you, my friend, when you knew it not, and bless God for the sermon which you have this night preached to my heart."

The honest laborer blushed for a moment at this unexpected intrusion and declaration, but immediately said, "Sir, you are welcome to a poor man's dwelling, if you come in the name of the Lord."

I just looked around at the wife, who seemed to be startled at my sudden appearance, and the six fine children who sat near her, and then said, "You were going to pray; I must beg of you, without regarding me, to go on, as if I were not here."

The man, whom I could not but love and reverence with a simple, unaffected, modest, and devout demeanor, did as I requested him. His prayer was full of tender affection and sincerity, expressed with great scriptural propriety, and was in all respects such as suited the preacher of those sentiments which I had overheard him deliver to his wife just before.

When he had finished, each of his children, according to the good old patriarchal custom of better days, kneeled down before him in turn to receive a father's blessing.

It was now late, and the rain was over. I gave the poor man my blessing, and received his in return. I wished them good night, and went onward to my own home, reflecting with much self-abasement of heart, what an honor and comfort it is, to be a poor man—and rich in the faith!