



ANALECTS FROM RICHTER.

THE HAPPY LIFE OF A PARISH PRIEST IN SWEDEN.

SWEDEN apart, the condition of a parish priest is in itself sufficiently happy; in Sweden, then, much more so. There he enjoys summer and winter pure and unalloyed by any tedious interruptions. A Swedish spring, which is always a late one, is no repetition, in a lower key, of the harshness of winter, but anticipates, and is a prelibation of perfect summer—laden with blossoms—radiant with the lily and the rose; insomuch, that a Swedish summer night represents implicitly one-half of Italy, and a winter night one-half of the world beside.

I will begin with winter, and I will suppose it to be Christmas. The priest, whom we shall imagine to be a German, and summoned from the southern climate of Germany upon presentation to the church of a Swedish hamlet lying in a high polar latitude, rises in cheerfulness about seven o'clock in the morning, and till half-past nine he burns his lamp. At nine o'clock the stars are still shining, and the unclouded moon even yet longer. This prolongation of starlight into the forenoon is to him delightful, for he is a German, and has a sense of something

marvellous in a starry forenoon. Methinks I behold the priest and his flock moving towards the church with lanterns; the lights dispersed amongst the crowd connect the congregation into the appearance of some domestic group or larger household, and carry the priest back to his childish years during the winter season and Christmas matins, when every hand bore its candle. Arrived at the pulpit, he declares to his audience the plain truth, word for word, as it stands in the gospel; in the presence of God all intellectual pretensions are called upon to be silent, the very reason ceases to be reasonable, nor is anything reasonable in the sight of God but a sincere and upright heart. . . .

Just as he and his flock are issuing from the church the bright Christmas sun ascends above the horizon, and shoots his beams upon their faces. The old men, who are numerous in Sweden, are all tinged with the colours of youth by the rosy morning lustre; and the priest, as he looks away from them to mother earth lying in the sleep of winter, and to the churchyard, where the flowers and the men are all in their graves together, might secretly exclaim with the poet—"Upon the dead mother, in peace and utter gloom, are reposing the dead children. After a time, uprises the everlasting sun; and the mother starts up at the summons of the heavenly dawn with a resurrection of her ancient bloom. And her children? Yes: but they must wait awhile."

At home he is awaited by a warm study, and a "long-levelled rule" of sunlight upon the book-clad wall.

The afternoon he spends delightfully; for, having before him such perfect flower-stands of pleasures, he scarcely knows where he should settle. Supposing it to be Christmas-day, he preaches again: he preaches on a subject which

calls up images of the beauteous eastern-land, or of eternity. By this time, twilight and gloom prevailed through the church: only a couple of wax-lights upon the altar threw wondrous and mighty shadows through the aisles: the angel that hangs down from the roof above the baptismal font is awoke into a solemn life by the shadows and the rays, and seems almost in the act of ascension: through the windows the stars or the moon are beginning to peer: aloft, in the pulpit, which is now hid in gloom, the priest is inflamed and possessed by the sacred burden of glad tidings which he is announcing: he is lost and insensible to all besides; and from amidst the darkness which surrounds him, he pours down his thunders, with tears and agitation, reasoning of future worlds, and of the heaven of heavens, and whatsoever else can most powerfully shake the heart and the affections.

Descending from the pulpit in these holy fervours, he now, perhaps, takes a walk; it is about four o'clock: and he walks beneath a sky lit up by the shifting northern lights, that to his eye appear but an Aurora striking upwards from the eternal morning of the south, or as a forest composed of saintly thickets, like the fiery bushes of Moses, that are round the throne of God.

Thus, if it be the afternoon of Christmas-day; but if it be any other afternoon, visitors, perhaps, come and bring their well-bred, grown-up daughters. Like the fashionable world in London, he dines at sunset; that is to say, like the unfashionable world of London, he dines at two o'clock; and drinks coffee by moonlight; and the parsonage-house becomes an enchanted palace of pleasure gleaming with twilight, starlight, and moonlight. Or, perhaps, he goes over to the schoolmaster, who is teaching his afternoon school; there, by the candle-light, he gathers round his

knees all his scholars, as if—being the children of his spiritual children—they must therefore be his own grandchildren; and with delightful words he wins their attention, and pours knowledge into their docile hearts.

All these pleasures failing, he may pace up and down in his library, already, by three o'clock, gloomy with twilight, but fitfully enlivened by a glowing fire, and steadily by the bright moonlight; and he needs do no more than taste at every turn of his walk a little orange marmalade—to call up images of beautiful Italy, and its gardens, and orange groves, before all his five senses, and, as it were, to the very tip of his tongue. Looking at the moon, he will not fail to recollect that the very same silver disc hangs at the very same moment between the branches of the laurels in Italy. It will delight him to consider that the Æolian harp, and the lark, and indeed music of all kinds, and the stars, and children, are just the same in hot climates and in cold. And when the post-boy, that rides in with news from Italy, winds his horn through the hamlet, and with a few simple notes raises up on the frozen window of his study a vision of flowery realms; and when he plays with treasured leaves of roses and of lilies from some departed summer, or with plumes of a bird of paradise, the memorial of some distant friend; when, further, his heart is moved by the magnificent sounds of Lady-Day, Salad-season, Cherry-time, Trinity-Sundays, the rose of June, etc., how can he fail to forget that he is in Sweden by the time that his lamp is brought in; and then, indeed, he will be somewhat disconcerted to recognise his study in what had now shaped itself to his fancy as a room in some foreign land. However, if he would pursue this airy creation, he need but light at his lamp a wax candle end, to gain a glimpse through the whole evening into that world

of fashion and splendour, from which he purchased the said wax candle end. For I suppose, that at the court of Stockholm, as elsewhere, there must be candle ends to be bought of the state-footmen.

But now, after the lapse of half-a-year, all at once there strikes upon his heart something more beautiful than Italy, where the sun sets so much earlier in summer-time than it does at our Swedish hamlet: and what is *that*? It is the longest day, with the rich freight it carries in its bosom, and leading by the hand the early dawn blushing with rosy light, and melodious with the carolling of larks at one o'clock in the morning. Before two, that is, at sunrise, the elegant party that we mentioned last winter arrive in gay clothing at the parsonage; for they are bound on a little excursion of pleasure in company with the priest. At two o'clock they are in motion; at which time all the flowers are glittering, and the forests are gleaming with the mighty light. The warm sun threatens them with no storm nor thunder showers; for both are rare in Sweden. The priest, in common with the rest of the company, is attired in the costume of Sweden; he wears a short jacket with a broad scarf, his short cloak above that, his round hat with floating plumes, and shoes tied with bright ribbons; like the rest of the men, he resembles a Spanish knight or a Provençal, or other men of the south; more especially when, he and his gay company are seen flying through the lofty foliage luxuriant with blossom, that within so short a period of weeks has shot forth from the garden plots and the naked boughs.

That a longest day like this, bearing such a cornucopia of sunshine, of cloudless ether, of buds and bells, of blossoms and of leisure, should pass away more rapidly than the shortest—is not difficult to suppose. As early as eight

o'clock in the evening the party breaks up; the sun is now burning more gently over the half-closed sleepy flowers; about nine he has mitigated his rays, and is beheld bathing as it were naked in the blue depths of heaven; about ten, at which hour the company reassembled at the parsonage, the priest is deeply moved, for throughout the hamlet, though the tepid sun, now sunk to the horizon, is still shedding a sullen glow upon the cottages and the window-panes, everything reposes in profoundest silence and sleep: the birds even are all slumbering in the golden summits of the woods: and at last the solitary sun himself sets, like a moon, amidst the universal quiet of nature. To our priest, walking in his romantic dress, it seems as though rosy-coloured realms were laid open, in which fairies and spirits range; and he would scarcely feel an emotion of wonder, if, in this hour of golden vision, his brother, who ran away in childhood, should suddenly present himself as one alighting from some blooming heaven of enchantment.

The priest will not allow his company to depart: he detains them in the parsonage garden, where, says he, every one that chooses may slumber away in beautiful bowers the brief, warm hours until the reappearance of the sun. This proposal is generally adopted, and the garden is occupied: many a lovely pair are making believe to sleep, but, in fact, are holding each other by the hand. The happy priest walks up and down through the parterres. Coolness comes, and a few stars. His night-violets and gilly-flowers open and breathe out their powerful odours. To the north, from the eternal morning of the pole, exhales as it were a golden dawn. The priest thinks of the village of his childhood far away in Germany; he thinks of the life of man, his hopes, and his aspirations: and he is calm and at peace

with himself. Then all at once starts up the morning sun in his freshness. Some there are in the garden who would fain confound it with the evening sun, and close their eyes again; but the larks betray all, and awaken every sleeper from bower to bower.

Then again begin pleasure and morning in their pomp of radiance; and almost I could persuade myself to delineate the course of this day also, though it differs from its predecessor hardly by so much as the leaf of a rose-bud.

DREAM UPON THE UNIVERSE.

I had been reading an excellent dissertation of Krüger's upon the old vulgar error which regards the space from one earth and sun to another as empty. Our sun, together with all its planets, fills only the 31,419,460,000,000th part of the whole space between itself and the next solar body. Gracious Heavens! thought I, in what an unfathomable abyss of emptiness were this universe swallowed up and lost, if all were void and utter vacuity except the few shining points of dust which we call a planetary system! To conceive of our earthly ocean as the abode of death and essentially incapable of life, and of its populous islands as being no greater than snail-shells, would be a far less error in proportion to the compass of our planet than that which attributes emptiness to the great mundane spaces; and the error would be far less if the marine animals were to ascribe life and fulness exclusively to the sea, and to regard the atmospheric ocean above them as empty and untenanted. According to Herschel, the most remote of the galaxies which the telescope discovers, lie at such a distance from us, that their light, which reaches us at this day, must have set out on its journey two millions

of years ago; and thus by optical laws it is possible that whole squadrons of the starry hosts may be now reaching us with their beams, which have themselves perished ages ago. Upon this scale of computation for the dimensions of the world, what heights and depths and breadths must there be in this universe—in comparison of which the positive universe would be itself a nihility, were it crossed, pierced, and belted about by so illimitable a wilderness of nothing! But is it possible that any man can for a moment overlook those vast forces which must pervade these imaginary deserts with eternal surges of flux and reflux, to make the very paths to those distant starry coasts voyageable to our eyes? Can you lock up in a sun or in its planets their reciprocal forces of attraction? does not the light stream through the immeasurable spaces between our earth and the nebula which is furthest removed from us? And in this stream of light there is as ample an existence of the positive, and as much a home for the abode of a spiritual world, as there is a dwelling-place for thy own spirit in the substance of the brain. To these and similar reflections succeeded the following dream:—

Methought my body sank down in ruins, and my inner form stepped out apparelled in light; and by my side there stood another Form which resembled my own, except that it did not shine like mine, but lightened unceasingly. "Two thoughts," said the Form, "are the wings with which I move: the thought of *Here*, and the thought of *There*. And, behold! I am yonder,"—pointing to a distant world. "Come, then, and wait on me with thy thoughts and with thy flight, that I may show to thee the universe under a veil." And I flew along with the Form. In a moment our earth fell back, behind our consuming flight, into an abyss of distance; a faint gleam only was reflected from

the summits of the Cordilleras, and a few moments more reduced the sun to a little star; and soon there remained nothing visible of our system except a comet which was travelling from our sun with angelic speed in the direction of Sirius. Our flight now carried us so rapidly through the flocks of the solar bodies—flocks past counting, unless to their heavenly Shepherd—that scarcely could they expand themselves before us into the magnitude of moons, before they sank behind us into pale nebular gleams; and their planetary earths could not reveal themselves for a moment to the transcendent rapidity of our course. At length Sirius and all the brotherhood of our constellations and the galaxy of our heavens stood far below our feet as a little nebula amongst other yet more distant nebulae. Thus we flew on through the starry wildernesses: one heaven after another unfurled its immeasurable banners before us, and then rolled up behind us: galaxy behind galaxy towered up into solemn attitudes before which the spirit shuddered; and they stood in long array through which the Infinite Being might pass into progress. Sometimes the Form that lightened would outfly my weary thoughts; and then it would be seen far off before me like a coruscation amongst the stars—till suddenly I thought again to myself the thought of *There*, and then I was at its side. But as we were thus swallowed up by one abyss of stars after another, and the heavens above our heads were not emptier, neither were the heavens below them fuller; and as suns without intermission fell into the solar ocean like water-spouts of a storm which fall into the ocean of waters; then at length the human heart within me was overburdened and weary, and yearned after some narrow cell or quiet oratory in this metropolitan cathedral of the universe. And I said to the Form at my side, "Oh, Spirit! has

then this universe no end?" And the Form answered and said, "Lo! it has no beginning."

Suddenly, however, the heavens above us appeared to be emptied, and not a star was seen to twinkle in the mighty abyss; no gleam of light to break the unity of the infinite darkness. The starry hosts behind us had all contracted into an obscure nebula, and at length *that* also had vanished. And I thought to myself, "At last the universe has ended;" and I trembled at the thought of the illimitable dungeon of pure, pure darkness which here began to imprison the creation: I shuddered at the dead sea of nothing, in whose unfathomable zone of blackness the jewel of the glittering universe seemed to be set and buried for ever; and through the night in which we moved I saw the Form which still lightened as before, but left all around it unilluminated. Then the Form said to me in my anguish, "Oh! creature of little faith! Look up! the most ancient light is coming!" I looked: and in a moment came a twilight—in the twinkling of an eye a galaxy—and then with a choral burst rushed in all the company of stars. For centuries grey with age, for millennia hoary with antiquity, had the starry light been on its road to us; and at length out of heights inaccessible to thought it had reached us. Now, then, as through some renovated century, we flew through new cycles of heavens. At length again came a starless interval; and far longer it endured, before the beams of a starry host again had reached us.

As we thus advanced for ever through an interchange of nights and solar heavens, and as the interval grew still longer and longer before the last heaven we had quitted contracted to a point, and as once we issued suddenly from the middle of thickest night into an Aurora Borealis, the herald of an expiring world, and we found throughout this

cycle of solar systems that a day of judgment had indeed arrived; the suns had sickened, and the planets were heaving—rocking, yawning in convulsions, the subterraneous waters of the great deeps were breaking up, and lightnings that were ten diameters of a world in length ran along—from east to west—from Zenith to Nadir; and here and there, where a sun should have been, we saw instead through the misty vapour a gloomy, ashy, leaden corpse of a solar body, that sucked in flames from the perishing world, but gave out neither light nor heat; and as I saw, through a vista which had no end, mountain towering above mountain, and piled up with what seemed glittering snow from the conflict of solar and planetary bodies; then my spirit bent under the load of the universe, and I said to the Form, “Rest, rest, and lead me no further: I am too solitary in the creation itself; and in its deserts yet more so: the full world is great, but the empty world is greater; and with the universe increase its Zaaarahs.”

Then the Form touched me like the flowing of a breath, and spoke more gently than before:—“In the presence of God there is no emptiness: above, below, between, and round about the stars, in the darkness and in the light, dwelleth the true and very Universe, the sum and fountain of all that is. But thy spirit can bear only earthly images of the unearthly; now then I cleanse thy sight with euphrasy; look forth, and behold the images.” Immediately my eyes were opened; and I looked, and I saw as it were an interminable sea of light—sea immeasurable, sea unfathomable, sea without a shore. All spaces between all heavens were filled with happiest light: and there was a thundering of floods: and there were seas above the seas, and seas below the seas: and I saw all the trackless regions that we had voyaged over: and my eye comprehended the

farthest and the nearest: and darkness had become light, and the light darkness: for the deserts and wastes of the creation were now filled with the sea of light, and in this sea the suns floated like ash-grey blossoms, and the planets like black grains of seed. Then my heart comprehended that immortality dwelled in the spaces between the worlds, and death only amongst the worlds. Upon all the suns there walked upright shadows in the form of men: but they were glorified when they quitted these perishable worlds, and when they sank into the sea of light: and the murky planets, I perceived, were but cradles for the infant spirits of the universe of light. In the Zaaarahs of the creation I saw—I heard—I felt—the glittering—the echoing—the breathing of life and creative power. The suns were but as spinning-wheels, the planets no more than weavers' shuttles, in relation to the infinite web which composes the veil of Isis,* which veil is hung over the whole creation, and lengthens as any finite being attempts to raise it. And in sight of this immeasurability of life no sadness could endure, but only joy that knew no limit, and happy prayers.

But in the midst of this great vision of the universe the Form that lightened eternally had become invisible, or had vanished to its home in the unseen world of spirits: I was

* On this antique mode of symbolising the mysterious Nature which is at the heart of all things and connects all things into one whole, possibly the reader may feel not unwilling to concur with Kant's remark at page 197 of his *Critik der Urtheilskraft*:—“Perhaps in all human composition there is no passage of greater sublimity, nor amongst all sublime thoughts any which has been more sublimely expressed, than that which occurs in the inscription upon the temple of Isis (the Great Mother—Nature): *I am whatsoever is—whatsoever has been—whatsoever shall be: and the veil which is over my countenance no mortal hand has ever raised.*”

left alone in the centre of a universe of life, and I yearned after some sympathising being. Suddenly from the starry deeps there came floating through the ocean of light a planetary body; and upon it there stood a woman whose face was as the face of a Madonna; and by her side there stood a child, whose countenance varied not, neither was it magnified as he drew nearer. This child was a king, for I saw that he had a crown upon his head; but the crown was a crown of thorns. Then also I perceived that the planetary body was our unhappy earth; and, as the earth drew near, this child who had come forth from the starry deeps to comfort me threw upon me a look of gentlest pity and of unutterable love, so that in my heart I had a sudden rapture of joy such as passes all understanding, and I awoke in the tumult of my happiness.

I awoke: but my happiness survived my dream; and I exclaimed—Oh! how beautiful is death, seeing that we die in a world of life and of creation without end; and I blessed God for my life upon earth, but much more for the life in those unseen depths of the universe which are emptied of all but the Supreme Reality, and where no earthly life nor perishable hope can enter.

COMPLAINT OF THE BIRD IN A DARKENED CAGE.

“Ah!” said the imprisoned bird, “how unhappy were I in my eternal night, but for those melodious tones which sometimes make their way to me like beams of light from afar, and cheer my gloomy day. But I will myself repeat these heavenly melodies like an echo, until I have stamped them in my heart; and then I shall be able to bring comfort to myself in my darkness!” Thus spoke the little warbler, and soon had learned the sweet airs that were sung to it with

voice and instrument. That done, the curtain was raised; for the darkness had been purposely contrived to assist in its instruction. O man! how often dost thou complain of overshadowing grief and of darkness resting upon thy days! And yet what cause for complaint, unless indeed thou hast failed to learn wisdom from suffering? For is not the whole sum of human life a veiling and an obscuring of the immortal spirit of man? Then first, when the fleshly curtain falls away, may it soar upwards into a region of happier melodies!

ON THE DEATH OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

Ephemera die all at sunset, and no insect of this class has ever sported in the beams of the morning sun.* Happy are ye, little human ephemera! Ye played only in the ascending beams, and in the early dawn, and in the eastern light; ye drank only of the prelibations of life; hovered for a little space over a world of freshness and of blossoms; and fell asleep in innocence before yet the morning dew was exhaled!

THE PROPHETIC DEW-DROPS.

A delicate child, pale and prematurely wise, was complaining on a hot morning that the poor dew drops had been too hastily snatched away, and not allowed to glitter on the flowers like other happier dew-drops † that live the whole night through, and sparkle in the moonlight and through the

* Some class of ephemeral insects are born about five o'clock in the afternoon, and die before midnight, supposing them to live to old age.

† If the dew is evaporated immediately upon the sun-rising, rain and storm follow in the afternoon; but if it stays and glitters for a long time after sunrise, the day continues fair.