RETROSPECT

OF

WESTERN TRAVEL.

VILLAGES.

"These ample fields
Nourished their harvests: here their herds were fed,
When haply by their stalls the bison lowed,
And bowed his maned shoulder to the yoke.
. . . . . From the ground
Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice
Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn
Of Sabbath worshippers."

Bryant.

The villages of New England are all more or less beautiful; and the most beautiful of them all is, I believe, Northampton. They have all the graceful weeping elm; wide roads overshadowed with wood; mounds or levels of a rich verdure; white churches and comfortable and picturesque frame dwellings. Northampton has these beauties and more. It lies in the rich meadows which border the Connecticut, beneath the protection of high wooded hills. The habitations of its gentry crown

the green knolls and terraces on which the village stands; or are half buried in gay gardens, or hid under clumps of elm. The celebrated Mount Holyoke and Mount Tom are just at hand, and the Sugarloaf is in view; while the brimming Connecticut winds about and about in the meadows, as if unwilling, like the traveller, to leave such a spot.

The pilgrims were not long in discovering the promise of the rich alluvial lands amidst which Northampton stands; and their descendants established themselves there, as in the midst of a wilderness, long before there were any settlements between the spot on which they had sat down and the coast. The perils of such an abode were extreme; but so were its temptations; and here, for many years, did a handful of whites continue to live, surrounded by red neighbours,—now trafficking, now fighting; sometimes agreeing to render mutual service, but always on the watch against mutual injury. So early as 1658, the township of Northampton (then called Nonotuc) was purchased at the price set upon it by the Indians; viz., for ninety square miles of land, the sellers demanded one hundred fathom of wampum by tale, and ten coats; and that the purchasers should plough for the Indians sixteen acres of land, on the east side of the river, the next summer. The making the purchase was the smallest part of the settlers' business; the defending them-

selves in the wilderness, surrounded as they were by numerous tribes of Indians, was a far more serious matter. The usual arrangement of a village was planned with a regard to safety from plunder and massacre. The surviving effect is that of beauty, which the busy settlers cannot be supposed to have much regarded at the time. The dwellings were erected in one long street, each house within its own enclosure, and, in many cases, fortified. The street was bordered with trees; and in the midst stood the "meeting-house," often fortified also. This street was, when it was possible, built across the neck of a peninsula formed by the windings of the river; or from hill to hill in the narrowest part of a valley. The cattle which grazed during the day in the peninsula, or under the eye of the owners, were driven at night into the area between the rows of houses. Here and there a village was surrounded with palisades. But no kind of defence availed for any long period. From time to time disasters happened to the most careful and the most valiant. Fire was an agent of destruction which could not be always defied. When the village was burned, its inhabitants were helpless. The women and children were carried off into captivity, and the place lay desolate till a new party of adventurers arrived to clear away the ruins, and commence a fresh experiment.

Traditions of the horrors of the Indian wars spring up at every step in this valley, and make the stranger speculate on what men and women were made of in the days when they could voluntarily fix their abode among savage foes, while there were safer places of habitation at their command on the coast. The settlers seem, by the testimony of all history, to have been possessed of spirit proportioned to their needs. We hear of women being employed in the cellars casting bullets, and handing them to their husbands during an onset of the savages; and of a girl plucking a saddle from under the head of a sleeping Indian, saddling a horse, and galloping off, swimming rivers, and penetrating forests till she reached her home. The fate of the family of the Rev. John Williams, who were living in the valley of the Connecticut, at the end of the seventeenth century, and were broken up by the Indians in an attack on the village of Deerfield, is a fair specimen of the chances to which residents in such lodges in the wilderness were exposed.

The enemy came over the snow, which was four feet deep, and hard enough to bear them up, and thus were enabled to surmount the palisades. Not being expected at that time of year, they met with no opposition. The inhabitants had not time to rouse themselves from sleep before they were tomahawked or captured. Out of a population of two

hundred and eighty, forty-seven were killed, and one hundred and twelve made prisoners. Mr. Williams was the minister of the settlement. Two of his children were killed on the threshold of his own door. His son Eleazer escaped, and was left behind. Mrs. Williams was one of the Mathers of Northampton. She was marched off, with her husband and several remaining children, in the direction of Canada: but they were not allowed to be together and comfort each other. It was a weary march for sufferers who carried such heavy hearts into so horrible a captivity. Over wastes of snow, through thawing brooks, among rugged forest-paths, they were goaded on,—not permitted to look back, or to loiter, or to stop, except at the pleasure of their captors. Mrs. Williams presently fell behind. She was in delicate health, and unused to hardship like this. When her husband had passed Green River, he looked back and saw her faltering on the bank, and then stumbling into the water. He turned to implore the savage who guarded him to allow him to go back and help his wife. He was refused, and when he looked again she had disappeared. Having fallen into the water through weakness, an Indian had buried his tomahawk in her skull, stepped over her body, and passed on. Her remains were discovered and carried back to Deerfield for interment.

For a few moments the captives had been tantalised with a hope of release. The Indians were attacked during their retreat by a small body of settlers, and pressed hard. At this moment an Indian runner was despatched to the guard, with orders to put all the prisoners to death. A ball laid him low while he was on his errand; and the settlers being compelled to give way, the order about the prisoners was not renewed.

At night they encamped on the snow, digging away spaces to lie down in, and spreading boughs of the spruce-fir for couches. During the first night one of the captives escaped; and in the morning Mr. Williams was ordered to tell his companions, that if any more made their escape, the rest of the prisoners should be burned.

At the close of a day's march, when they had advanced some way on their long journey, a maid-servant belonging to Mr. Williams's family came to the pastor, requested his blessing, and offered her farewell. He inquired what she meant. She replied, with great quietness of manner, that she perceived that all who lagged in the march were tomahawked: that she had kept up with great difficulty through this day; and that she felt she should perish thus on the morrow. Mr. Williams examined into her state of body, and was convinced that she was nearly exhausted. He gave his bless-

ing, and this was all he could do for her. He watched her incessantly the next day. He saw her growing more feeble every hour, but still calm and gentle. She kept up till late in the afternoon, when she lagged behind: being urged, she fell, and was despatched with the tomahawk. Two of the prisoners were starved to death on the road; and fifteen others were murdered like Mrs. Williams and her servant.

The pastor, with his remaining children, reached Canada, where he remained, suffering great hardships, for two years and a half. He was ransomed, with sixty-one others, and returned to Boston, where he was waited upon by a deputation from his old parish, and requested to resume his duties among the remnant of his people. He actually returned, and died in peace there, twenty-three years afterwards. It appears that all his captive children but one were redeemed. Two besides Eleazer were educated at Harvard College. His little daughter, Eunice, was six years old when she was carried away. She grew up to womanhood among the Indians, and married a red man, retaining the name of Williams, and adopting the Romish faith. Being brought to Deerfield to see her family, she could not be persuaded to remain; nor would she accommodate herself to the habits of civilised life, preferring to sleep on the floor on a blanket, to using a

bed. Some half-breed descendants of her's are living on the borders of Lake Michigan.

The sufferers seem to have consoled themselves with turning their disasters into verse; sometimes piously, in hymns, and sometimes in a lighter ballad strain, like the following:—

"'Twas nigh unto Pigwacket, on the eighth day of May,
They spied a rebel Indian, soon after break of day;
He on a bank was walking, upon a neck of land,
Which leads into a pond, as we're made to understand.

. . . . . .

Then up spoke Captain Lovewell, when first the fight began,
'Fight on, my valiant heroes! you see they fall like rain.'
For as we are inform'd, the Indians were so thick,
A man could scarcely fire a gun, and some of them not hit."

Many of the half-breeds who have sprung from the wars between the settlers and the natives have been missionaries among the savages. Much doubt hangs over the utility of Indian missions: if good has been done, it seems to be chiefly owing to the offices of half-breeds, who modify the religion to be imparted, so as to suit it to the habits of mind and life of the new converts. As far as I could learn, the following anecdote is no unfair specimen of the way in which missionaries and their religion are primarily regarded by the savages to whom they are sent.

Mr. K., a missionary among a tribe of northern Indians, was wont to set some simple refreshment, —fruit and cider,—before his converts, when they

came from a distance to see him. An old man, who had no pretensions to be a Christian, desired much to be admitted to the refreshments, and proposed to some of his converted friends to accompany them on their next visit to the missionary. They told him he must be a Christian first. What was that? He must know all about the Bible. When the time came, he declared himself prepared, and undertook the journey with them. When arrived, he seated himself opposite the missionary, wrapped in his blanket, and looking exceedingly serious. In answer to an inquiry from the missionary, he rolled up his eyes, and solemnly uttered the following words, with a pause between each—

"Adam—Eve—Cain—Noah—Jeremiah—Beelzebub—Solomon—"

"What do you mean?" asked the missionary.

"Solomon—Beelzebub—Noah—"

"Stop, stop. What do you mean?"

"I mean—cider."

This is one way in which an unintelligible religion is received by savages. Another resembles the mode in which they meet offers of traffic from suspicious parties:—"the more you say bow and arrows, the more we won't make them." Where Christianity is received among them with any efficacy, it appears to be exactly in proportion to the skill of the missionary in associating the new truth

he brings with that which was already sanctified in their hearts; in proportion as the new religion is made a sequel of the old one, instead of a substitution for it.

The dusky race was in my mind's eye as we followed the windings of the river through the rich valley from Springfield to Northampton. The very names of the places, the hamlet of Hoccanum, at the foot of Mount Holyoke, and that of Pascommuc, lying below Mount Tom, remind the traveller how the possessors have been displaced from this fair land, and how their descendants must be mourning their lost Quonnecticut. Such sympathies soon wither away, however, amidst the stir and loveliness of the sunny village.

We had letters of introduction to some of the inhabitants of Northampton, and knew that our arrival was expected: but we little anticipated such eagerness of hospitality as we were met with. The stage was stopped by a gentleman who asked for me. It was Mr. Bancroft, the historian, then a resident of Northampton. He cordially welcomed us as his guests, and ordered the stage up the hill to his house; such a house! It stood on a lofty terrace; and its balcony overlooked first the garden, then the orchard stretching down the slope; then the delicious village, and the river with its meadows; while opposite rose Mount Holyoke. Far off in the