" *Familiar in their Mouths as* HOUSEHOLD WORDS."—SHAKESPEARE.

HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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AN UNPAID SERVANT OF THE STATE.

THE public is just now suffering the inconveniences connected with a change of servants. Every housekeeper knows what that is; and so does every politician. The servants of the public have a great deal of work to do, and many little hopes and little interests depend on their attention. When there is a change made in the tenants of the offices at Downing Street, not only do many prominent and much-discussed intentions perish unfulfilled, but many quiet plans and promises for evil or for good, of which the world hears little, take a blight at the same time. It concerns us now to speak of one of these.

The public must be well aware that it has servants out of Downing Street; and one such servant, who has for years been working quite as hard as any placeman, for the public good, without either asking or expecting any payment, has, by disinterested labour, broken down his health. He is a poor man, who, after twelve hours of daily labour for his own support, has for the last fourteen years given to his country daily—in an unpretending way—as much time as is usually included in the hours of business at a public office. The wild man, who has been so foolish as to do all this without a penny of remuneration, and who, more foolishly still than this, has spent upon the public all that could be wrung out of his earnings as a weekly labourer—who has produced, in his quiet, silly way, results that will hand his name down as a tender recollection to our children's children—is Mr. Thomas Wright of Manchester.

"We never heard of Mr. Thomas Wright of Manchester," some of our children possibly may say.

Children, as yet the world, sometimes, does not talk most about its best inhabitants! Perhaps you may grow old, in a day when Thomas Wrights will receive public honour; although they do not court it, and when Lord Tomnoddies will take to modesty as the most popular way to place and pension. But now, in our day, to return to the point from which we set out, namely, the falling of small things with great, of worms with mountains; while the propriety of giving a scanty return—pension they call it—for his public services, to Mr. Wright, was being recognised by Government, the Government fell down, and it remains to be seen what may be done by those who are perhaps destined to come (like Jill) tumbling after.

Who is Mr. Wright? The fathers probably have heard his name; if so, let us instruct our children of his doings. Thomas Wright, of Manchester, is a worn but not a weary man of sixty-three, who has for forty-seven years been weekly servant in a large iron foundry, of which he is now the foreman. His daily work begins at five o'clock in the morning, and closes at six in the evening; for forty-seven years he has worked through twelve hours daily, to support himself and those depending on him. Those depending on him are not few; he has had nineteen children; and at some periods there have been grandchildren looking to him for bread. His income never has attained two hundred pounds a-year. This is a life of toil. Exeter Hall might plead for him as a man taxed beyond the standard limit; but he had bread to earn, and knew that he had need to work for it: he did work with great zeal and great efficiency, obtaining very high respect and confidence from his employers. A man so labouring, and leading in his home an exemplary, pious life, might be entitled to go to bed betimes, and rest in peace between these days of industry and natural fatigue. What could a man do, in the little leisure left by so much unremitting work? Poor as he was—toiling as he did, a modest man of humble origin, with no power in the world to aid him but the wonderful spiritual power of an earnest will—Thomas Wright has found means, in his little intervals of leisure, to lead back, with a gentle hand, three hundred convicted criminals to virtue; to wipe the blot from their names and the blight from their prospects; to place them in honest homes, supported by an honest livelihood.

Fourteen years ago Mr. Wright visited, one Sunday, the New Bailey Prison, at Manchester, and took an earnest interest in what he saw. He knew that, with the stain of gaol upon them, the unhappy prisoners, after release, would seek in vain for occupation; and that society would shut the door of reformation on them, and compel them, if they would not starve, to walk on in the ways

of crime. The gaol-mark branding them as dangerous, men buttoned up their pockets when they pleaded for a second trial of their honesty, and left them helpless. Then, Thomas Wright resolved, in his own honest heart, that he would visit in the prisons and become a friend to those who had no helper.

The chaplain of the New Bailey, Mr. Bagshawe, recognised in the beginning the true practical benevolence of the simple-minded visitor. On his second visit a convict was pointed out, on whom Mr. Wright might test his power. It was certain power. From the vantage-ground of a comparative equality of station, he pleaded with his fellow workman for the wisdom of a virtuous and honest life. Heaven does, and Earth should, wipe out of account repented evil. Words warm from the heart, backed with a deep and contagious sense in the hearer of the high-minded virtue shown by his companion, were not uttered, like lip-sympathy, in vain. Then Thomas Wright engaged to help his friend, to get employment for him; and, if necessary, to be surety with his own goods for his honourable conduct. He fulfilled his pledge; and that man has been, ever since, a prosperous labourer, and an upright member of society.

So the work began. So earnest, so humble; yet, like other earnest, humble efforts, with a blessing of prosperity upon it. In this way, during the last fourteen years, by this one man, working in the leisure of a twelve-hours' daily toil, hundreds have been restored to peace. He has sent husbands repentant to their wives; he has restored fathers to the fatherless. Without incurring debt, supporting a large family on little gains, he has contrived to spare out of his little: contenting himself with a bare subsistence, that he might have clothes to give and bits of money, where they were required to reinstate an outcast in society.

Mr. Wright is a dissenter—free, of course, from bigotry; for bigotry can never co-exist with charity so genuine. Although a dissenter working spiritually in the prison, he never comes into jarring contact with the chaplain. He makes a point of kindling in his outcast friends a religious feeling; but that is not sectarian; he speaks only the largest sentiments of Christianity, and asks only that they attend, once every week, a place of worship, leaving them to choose what church or chapel it may be. And, in the chapel he himself attends, wherever his eye turns, he can see decent families who stand by his means there; men whom he has rescued from the vilest courses, kneeling modestly beside their children and their wives. Are not these families, substantial prayers?

Very humbly all this has been done. In behalf of each outcast in turn, Mr. Wright has pleaded with his own employer, or with others, in a plain, manly way. Many now work under himself, in his own place of occupation; his word and guarantee having been sufficient recommendation. Elsewhere, he has, when rebuffed, persevered from place to place, offering and laying down his own earnings as guarantee; clothing and assisting the repentant unemployed convict out of his own means, as far as possible, speaking words, or writing letters, with a patient zeal, to reconcile to him his honest relatives, or to restore lost friends. Bare sustenance for his own body by day, that he might screw out of himself little funds in aid of his good deeds—and four hours' sleep at night, after his hard work, that he might screw out of his bed more time for his devoted labour—these tell their tale upon the body of the man, who still works daily twelve hours for his family, and six or eight hours for his race. He is now sixty-three years old, and working forward on his course, worn, but unwearied.

No plaudits have been in his ear, and he has sought none. Of his labour, the success was the reward. Some ladies joined; and working quietly, as he does, in an undercurrent of society. After a while, he had from them the aid of a small charitable fund, to draw upon occasionally, in the interest of the poor friends for whom he struggled. Prison Inspectors found him out, and praised him in reports. At first there were a few words, and a note told of "this benevolent individual. His simple, unostentatious, but earnest and successful, labours on behalf of discharged prisoners are above all praise." After a few years, the reports grew in their enthusiasm, and strung together illustrations of the work that has been done so quietly. Let us quote from this source one or two examples:—

"Five years ago I was," owns a certain G. J., "in the New Bailey, convicted of felony, and sentenced to four months' imprisonment. When I was discharged from prison, I could get no employment. I went to my old employer, to ask him to take me again. He said, I need not apply to him, for if he could get me transported he would; so I could get no work until I met with Mr. Wright, who got me employed in a place, where I remained some time, and have been in employment ever since. I am now engaged as a screw cutter—a business I was obliged to learn—and am earning nineteen shillings and twopence a-week. I have a wife and four children, and but for Mr. Wright, I should have been a lost man."

Others tell how they were saved by the timely supplies of Mr. Wright's money, which "kept their heads above water" till they obtained the trust of an employer. Another, after telling his career, adds: "I am now, consequently, in very comfortable circumstances; I am more comfortable now than ever I was in my life; I wish every poor man was as comfortable as I am. I am free from tippling, and cursing, and swearing; have peace of mind, and no quarrelling at home as there used to be. I dare say I was as wicked a man as any in Manchester. I thought if I

could once get settled under such a gentleman as Mr. Wright, I would not abuse my opportunity, and all I expected I have received. I have got Bibles, hymn-book, prayer-book, and tracts; and those things I never had in my house since I have been married before. My wife is delighted. My boy goes to school, and my girl also."

Were the spirit of Mr. Wright diffused more generally through society, the number of fallen men—who, being restored with all due prudence to a generous confidence, "would not abuse their opportunity"—would tell decidedly on the statistics of our criminal courts and prisons. To labour as Mr. Wright has done, must be the prerogative of few, though all the indolent may note, by way of spur, how much a man even like Thomas Wright, poor, humble, scantily instructed, may beget of good out of an earnest will.

Mr. Wright's toil has of course chiefly been in Manchester and Salford, but he has visited also various prisons in Lancashire, Scotland, and London, and has been a friend to many of their inmates; Mr. Wright's name, like the odour of a violet, has quietly become diffused, and public journals have, from time to time, in paragraphs and notices, made recognition of his virtues. To those who needed information, we have now supplied a hint of what might be disclosed by a large narrative of obscure labours. We may revert now to the ideas with which we first set out.

On the 12th of January, in this year, the Justices of Peace at the Salford Quarter Sessions drew up a memorial to Lord John Russell, showing that Mr. Wright had devoted to the public service, unremunerated, time and labour, and even money, which he might have applied to his own private good; that for this reason, he has not, in his approaching age, any provision which will enable him to relax in toil for his own livelihood; and that the unwearied labour to which he has submitted, has impaired his strength. Having shown this, the memorial prays for such recognition from the Government as shall acknowledge Mr. Wright's past services, and enable him to devote his future labours more effectually to the public good.

A month after the signing of this memorial by the Justices of Salford, the excellent people of Manchester backed it by a public meeting. Government did not deny, we believe, Mr. Wright's title to a little pension. It is but just to the late Government, and more especially to the late Premier, to say that there has been no want of right feeling or a manly sense of responsibility in this respect. We are afraid to think how many and how great salaries are paid to public servants who keep, or don't keep, falcons, or attend, or don't attend, to other things. Mr. Wright having worked for his country in reforming criminals, saving their future gaol expense, and making them good working-men—having worked in this way for fourteen years, six hours a day, gratuitously over and above the close duties of his calling—having spent even his own money on the public—may be considered very well entitled to a salary of public halfpence. Gold, to be sure, is wanted for the buckhounds and the falcons; but the public, probably, will not be sorry if it should happen that the change in Downing Street does not quash the memorial from Salford, and that any little pile of pennies which may have been left by the outgoing servants on the mantelpiece, may be found labelled, "Thomas Wright's Pension," and bestowed accordingly.

The wish of the Manchester people, whose movement Thomas Wright himself has not said a word to stimulate, is to ensure to their citizen, for the remainder of his life, an income equal to that which he now derives from his employment in the foundry, or with a few pounds added—say two hundred pounds a-year. This, with the aid of Government, might probably be raised in their own town; but Mr. Wright is a man whom one would prefer to honour in the name of England, rather than of Manchester. It is very certain, that in whatever form either Manchester or England may pay to such a man a salary so trifling, though sufficient to enable him to spend his whole time upon prison labours, his exertions will give more than value for it year by year. And still there will remain the gift from Mr. Wright, of a large mass of well-spent time and most efficient, earnest labour. No acknowledgment, which this country is likely to make of services so modest, will suffice to turn the scale of obligation, and make Thomas Wright its debtor.

TIME AND THE HOUR.

Proud as we are apt to be of our achievements in science and art, it sometimes strikes some people that we do not reverence and admire enough the results of the sagacity, patience, and courage of men of a former generation. For instance—what an achievement is the discovery that the earth is not flat,—the discovery of its actual form,—the discovery of its relation to other parts of the system,—discoveries clenched by the fact, that we can predict future starry occurrences, account for apparent planetary errors in our own days, and explain, by means of the history of the solar system, some dubious incidents in the ancient history of man! It seems inexpressibly astonishing that men, on their little anthill, should be able to make out the facts of regions which they can never reach, and where they could not live to draw a single breath; that such imperceptible insects as they must appear, if heard of, in the sun and moon, should lay down, without mistake, and to demonstration, the laws of the sun and moon in their external relations. It is as if the aphides on a rosebush under a