

Pastor and People.

THE SABBATH.

"In the Spirit on the Lord's Day."

For the tired world what raptures blest
Thou givest birth, sweet day of rest!
Baptised with dew of purer grace,
Earth wears with thee a heavenlier face.

No sounds so glad fall on my ear
As when thy pleasant chimes so dear
Ring out the week-day toil and din
And ring the happy Sabbath in.

There seems a spirit in the air
Which loves God's presence to declare,
And draws the heart with tender chords
To heed the Father's loving words.

O would that we had ears to hear,
To-day, that Voice rise sweet and clear;
That reassured each soul might be,
Its spirit is, O God, with Thee.

With Thee in worship, here to find
The revelations of Thy mind;
For on this day, the rest above,
God sets His signet ring of love.

Woe to the sacrilegious hand
That would efface it from the land,
To leave life one unbroken chain
Of days of toil for sordid gain.

—Roland Brown, in *Christian Work*.

THE ONE LAWGIVER.

One of the most distinctly marked features of the church of the present day is the weakened hold which men have of the doctrines of future retribution. This is shown not by the alteration of creeds and confessions, but by the publication of books and pamphlets, by the utterances of prominent men in different communions and by the action of various local ecclesiastical bodies. In these it is declared with more or less emphasis that sin is not eternal, and that one day all men without exception will be brought home to happiness and to God. But if this be true then there is no such thing as retribution. All the penal sanctions of the law are changed into corrections, their real ultimate end being not the satisfaction of justice, but the reformation of the transgressor. Sympathy with the wrong doer takes the place of sympathy with eternal rectitude. This arises from a feeble sense of the evil of sin. Men shrink from the unsparing denunciations of Scripture, and are supposed to palliate and excuse moral delinquencies as if they were infirmities, accidents due to the weakness of man's nature, greatly to be regretted indeed, and avoided, yet not by any means demanding a penalty strictly endless. If we trace further back the source of these views, we find it in the inadequate apprehensions men have of the Divine Law. They do not keep in mind its holy, spiritual, searching, inflexible character. They do not recognize its absolute and unchangeable authority. They merge all the perfections of God into his one aspect as a Father, and so overlook his majesty as a moral governor. Forgetting, too, that even a father must rule, and that a family without discipline is on the sure road to ruin, they so explain the divine paternity as to make it mere good nature. The Father of all cannot finally reject any, and his grace is as universal as mankind. Making happiness rather than holiness the last end of his procedures, they resolve the law into an educational institution instead of an original and unbending standard of duty. In direct opposition to all such loose and indefinite opinions stands the positive assertion of the Apostle James (iv. 12), "There is one Lawgiver." That God is a Lawgiver arises from the fact that he is Creator. Even in the lower sphere of physical forces it would be inconsistent with his perfections to allow the existence of a permanent chaos. Were there no uniformity in natural sequences, science would become guesswork and life a riddle.

But if God imposes law upon unorganized matter, much more must He upon rational beings. Man, we are told, was made in the image of God, a free, self-conscious agent, endowed with reason, conscience and will, and therefore raised immeasurably above all other orders of being on earth. As the immediate offspring of God he partakes of

his spiritual nature, and therefore is capable of knowing him and having communion with him. But he is also capable of turning away from him and pursuing wrong courses. Man, therefore, must have a rule of action. His own moral constitution requires it, as well as his relation to his Maker upon whom he is dependent and to whom he is subject. The wise and holy God cannot be indifferent to the character of his intelligent creatures either in respect to their dispositions or their conduct. He must have a will upon the subject, and that will must necessarily take the shape of law. It is indeed conceivable that he might have so constituted men that they would always be disposed to do right, an infallible propensity of nature guiding them at every step, so that there never could be a possibility of their going wrong either from inclination or from mistake. But, so far as we know, the Almighty never did constitute any of his creatures after this manner. Such being the case, man with all his high endowments being fallible and peccable, there must needs be given to him a fixed rule of conduct. Mere suggestion or advice will not answer. There must be something absolute and peremptory, something that comes as the irrevocable declaration of God's own judgment of good and evil, something established over mankind, like the sun in the firmament, the same from the world's first day to the last. It says, *Thou shalt* or *Thou shalt not*, and it means to be obeyed. It has, therefore, sanctions, as it, indeed, must have; otherwise it would not be law at that, but a mere expression of opinion. And these sanctions must be enforced. For if not, then they might just as well not exist.—*Talbot W. Chambers in the Presbyterian and Reform Review*.

THE LESSON OF BETHESDA.

Why did our Lord single out one sufferer, amid the many at the Pool of Bethesda? There were a multitude of impotent folk lying in the five porches or colonnades, waiting for the moving of the waters. But we do not read that the Divine Healer wrought a miracle for any more than this single invalid. The reason, I conjecture, is this: No one at that pool of mercy was so pitifully unbefriended as this man. He had lain there a long time, and been tantalized by seeing other and nimbler patients reach the healing waters before he could creep in. Others had friends to help them. But this poor forsaken creature had no one, not even a wife or a child, to assist him into the pool. Suffering often makes people selfish. Perhaps, then, the loving Lord intended to rebuke the selfishness of the neglectful, as well as to show His sympathy for the neglected, by curing this one friendless cripple on the spot. There is a beautiful lesson here for us. Beside every pool of privilege or mercy in human life, there are one or more unbefriended sufferers, whose trials are aggravated by seeing others relieved, but no relief comes to them. Jesus teaches us to look after those who have nobody to care for them.

This is one lesson to be learned at Bethesda—which signifies the "house of mercy." There is another lesson which we would press home upon all our unconverted readers. It fits their case exactly. In all our congregations are more or less of spiritually diseased persons, who are seen every Sabbath in God's house of mercy. Their disease is sin. Whether blinded by it, or lamed, or withered, or paralyzed, the root of the malady is a sinful, unbelieving heart. They expect, at some time or other, to become Christians. Not one of them expects to "make his bed in hell." Yet every one of them does lie, and persists in lying, upon a bed of criminal delay—waiting for they can hardly tell what. A word now to each of these.

One of you, perhaps, is waiting for a powerful revival, when the waters will be greatly troubled, and then you will be cured. But Christ nowhere tells sinners to wait for revivals. "Now is your day of Salvation;" and now don't mean to-morrow. Jesus

Christ is as close to you to-day as He ever will be. No one else can ever cure your wicked heart. Here is another unconverted person who is waiting for some "angel" in the shape of a powerful, thrilling sermon, or a peculiar providence, which shall arouse you and do the needed work. You are mistaken. If you thus dictate to God, He will not do your bidding. A greater than any angel is beside you now; neither is there salvation in any other. It is not more sermons you need, nor startling providences; you need Jesus.

Another is waiting for "more conviction." How much do you require in order to accept Christ? How much did the cripple require at Bethesda? If you admit that you are a sinner, and that, unless Jesus saves you, you will be lost, this is enough conviction to start with. To tell God that you will never serve Him until He smites you with intense sorrow for sin, is an insult; it increases your guilt. No "angel" is going to trouble your stagnant heart with healing power while you are insulting God. Nor need you wait for some wonderful conversion. To each one of you lingerers and loiterers in sin, let me say you are cheating yourself with the devil's delusion.

Your immediate duty is all condensed into that one pithy sentence which Jesus spake to the cripple at the pool: "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." You are on your bed now. You put yourself there by your own sin. You have kept yourself there by your own choice. Every sinner is a sinner because he chooses to be; and you are no exception. Jesus commands you to repent, and trust Him, and follow Him. The moment you are willing to obey, He gives you strength to obey. Christ commanded that poor, miserable creature at Bethesda, who had been "in that case" for thirty-eight years, to "stand up." What, on those weak and withered limbs? Yes; for he could have no other to stand on. And the moment he obeys, and makes the honest attempt, a new power shoots through the nerves and muscles. The man is not lifted up. He rises up himself, and on his own limbs. But Jesus furnishes the strength. The man wanted to get up, and made a resolute effort to get up, and a supernatural power came into him, and enabled him to get up. His part in this happy transaction was *faith*; Christ's part was *grace*. Put the two together, and you have the history of every conversion that ever took place in our world.

Now, what hinders every unconverted sinner who reads these lines from being healed at once? To lie still means guilt, uneasiness of conscience, and final death. It means a wasted life here, and hell hereafter. The first act you honestly perform to please Christ breaks the spell. The first prayer you breathe sincerely for a new heart, and the first sin you refuse because Jesus bids you, puts you on your feet. These steps are all your steps. But the Divine love moves you to take them, and gives you the sufficient strength.

Here is the transcendent lesson of Bethesda. It teaches every sinner who desires salvation that all he must do is to *obey Jesus*. The "angel" you wait for will never come. Death will soon stand beside your "bed" of guilty delay. Jesus is already beside you with His warm heart of love. His short, simple command is: "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk."—*Rev. Theo. L. Cuyler, in "The Pulpit."*

INCREASE OF SABBATH-BREAKING.

The *Christian World* had, some time ago, a striking article on this subject, from which we extract the opening sentences. It is not only in the neighborhood of London that the phenomenon referred to is to be seen; the evil is everywhere, and need for a remedy is urgent.

"Archdeacon Farrar, in an article in this month's *Contemporary Review* against the Anglican Romanizing party, lets drop a sentence whose significance is far wider

than its relation to Ritualism. 'There are,' says he, 'thousands in England, where fifty years ago there were only scores, in the upper classes who now devote their Sundays exclusively to worldly amusements.'

In the working classes such men may be counted by millions.' The Archdeacon, in passing from the upper to the lower ranks of society, might have paused at the middle section of observe that this also contributes an immense and rapidly-increasing quota to the number of English people who are learning to pass their lives outside of the church and of the religious observance of Sunday. The crowds on the river at Richmond and at Maidenhead, and the swarms of bicyclists who fill the high-ways leading from the metropolis, and the other great centres, are recruited mainly from the middle classes. It is nowadays no uncommon spectacle to find the heads of a household, trained in the habits of the earlier generation, worshipping on Sunday in the church, while the sons, the representatives of the new order, are taking their pleasure in the fields. That amongst the classes who in this country have hitherto been the main supports of churches and of organized religion generally a new attitude is manifesting itself, is, in short, only too apparent, and it behoves those who have the spiritual interests of the nation at heart to take the phenomenon into the most careful consideration."

COME NEARER.

But you have come to Christ already and found relief? Then come nearer, nearer still. The closer your communion with Christ, the more comfort you will feel. The more you daily live by the side of the Fountain, the more you shall feel in yourself "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." John iv: 14. You shall not only be blessed yourself, but be a source of blessing to others. In this evil world you may not perhaps feel all the sensible comfort you could desire. But remember you cannot have two heavens. Perfect happiness is yet to come. The devil is not yet bound. There is "a good time coming" for all who feel their sins, and come to Christ and commit their thirsty souls to his keeping. When he comes again they shall be completely satisfied. They shall remember all the ways by which they were led, and see the need-be of everything that befell them. Above all, they shall wonder that they could ever live so long without Christ, and hesitate about coming to Him.—*Canon Ryle*.

BUSYBODIES.

There is a strong disposition upon the part of one or more persons in almost every church to "run things." They try to run the pastor, exercising more or less supervision over preaching or pastoral work, showing officiousness in regard to his personal or family affairs; shaping matters in the church to suit their own ideas, scheming to secure the adoption of their own methods or measures, and all with reference to the advancement of their own wishes or interests without a due consideration of the welfare of the whole church. Such people are never satisfied unless they are in the lead. They act as if the church was organized for their benefit and not for the promotion of the cause of Christ. If the schemes miscarry, or square defeat is encountered, they give way to pouting. The language of their hearts is: "We'll let you run things and we'll see how you will come out." They labor under the delusion that the church cannot get along without them. The forefather of this class of people was Diotrephes, of who the apostle John says: He "loveth to have the pre-eminence among them," that is, among his brethren. Nothing is more hurtful than the ambition for place and power in the church; than that officious and domineering spirit which, with but little, if any, consideration for the feelings and opinions of others, except of a particular faction, insists that its judgment must prevail, that things must be done in its way. Such a spirit will sooner or later lead to a division and strife. It is not a Christian spirit. Such persons should remember that the church grew and multiplied before they came into the world and that it will doubtless advance by wonderful strides after they leave the world. It has done and will do all this in spite of the Diotrephian spirit.

The Dublin Presbytery has passed a resolution declaring its belief in the Scripturality of instrumental aid in public as well as in private worship, and, at the same time, an intention to respect the "truce" until its expiration in June, 1896. A resolution was also carried: That the Presbytery overture the Assembly to give, on the close of this "truce," a deliverance on the Scripturality of instrumental music.