

Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

PRaise.

BY E. A. T., TORONTO.

Heavenly Father, we will praise Thee,
For it is both meet and right ;
Praise Thee in the morning sunlight
And the lovely star-lit night.
Praise Thee for the glowing landscape
Spread for our admiring gaze,
For the fruit and for the flowers
Unto Thee our thanks we raise.

Praise Thee for the abundant harvest
Of ripened fruit and golden grain ;
For the cattle in the pasture,
And the sheep upon the plain.
Praise Thee for the summer sunshine,
For the winter's frost and snow ;
For the beauty of the seasons
As in turn they come and go.

Praise Thee for the pleasant music
Floating round us in the air ;
For the merry little warblers
Singing to us everywhere.
Praise Thee for the ties of kindred,
How dear, no language can express ;
Praise Thee for the satisfaction
Of domestic happiness.

Praise Thee for the hope of heaven,
For the joy Thy words afford ;
For the pardon, peace and safety,
Found in Christ our risen Lord.
Praise Thee in the early morning,
Praise Thee at the noontide hour,
And when all our toils are over
We will praise Thee more and more.

THE PLEIADES.

As an eminent Professor has well remarked. "There are glories in the Bible on which the eye of man has not gazed sufficiently long to admire them : there are difficulties the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself. There are notes struck in places, which, like some discoveries of science, have sounded before their time, and only after many days been caught up, and found a response on the earth. There are germs of truth which, after thousands of years, have never yet taken root in the world." The question in Job, chapter xxxvii., 31, contains a remarkable example of one of these far-reaching and anticipative truths. If our translators have correctly identified the group of stars to which they have given the familiar name of Pleiades—and we have every reason to confide in their fidelity—we have a striking proof here afforded to us of the perfect harmony that exists between the revelations of science and those of the Bible—the one illustrating and confirming the other. We know not what progress the Chaldeans may have made in astronomical discovery at this early period ; but it is not at all likely that the great truth in question was known to Job—unless, indeed, specially revealed to him, in order to enlarge his apprehensions of the wisdom and power of the Creator. So far as he was concerned, the question, "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?" might have referred solely to what was then the common belief, viz., that the genial weather of spring was somehow caused by the peculiar position of the Pleiades in the sky at that season ; as if God had simply said, "Canst thou hinder or retard the spring?" It remained for modern science to make a wider and grander application of it, and to show in this, as in other instances, that the Bible is so framed as to expand its horizon with the march of discovery—that the requisite stability of a moral rule is, in it, most admirably combined with the capability of movement and progress. If we examine the text in the original, we find that the Chaldaic word translated in our version Pleiades is *Chimah*, meaning literally a hinge, pivot, or axle, which turns round and moves other bodies along with it. Now, strange to say, the group of stars thus characterized has recently been ascertained, by a series of independent calculations—in utter ignorance of the meaning of the text—to be actually the hinge or axle round which the solar system resolves. It was long known as one of the most elementary truths of astronomy, that the earth and the planets revolve around the sun, but the question recently began to be raised among astronomers "Does the sun stand still? or does it move round some other object in space, carrying its train of planets and their satellites along with it in its orbit?" Attention being thus specially directed to this subject, it was soon found that the sun had an appreciable motion, which tended in the direction of a lily-shaped group of small stars, called the constellation of Hercules. Towards this constellation the stars seem to be opening out ; while at the opposite point of the sky their mutual distances are apparently diminishing—as if they were drifting away, like the foaming wake of a ship, from the sun's course. When this great physical truth was established beyond the possibility of a doubt, the next subject of investigation was the point or centre round which the sun performed this marvellous revolution ; and after a series of elaborate observations and most ingenious calculations, this intricate problem was also satisfactorily solved—one of the great triumphs of human genius. M. Mad'ar, of Dorpat, found that Alcyone, the brightest star of the Pleiades, is the centre of gravity of our vast solar system—the luminous *hinge* in the heavens round which our sun and his attendant planets are moving through space. The very com-

plexity and isolation of the system of the Pleiades, exhibiting seven distinct orbs closely compressed to the naked eye, but nine or ten times that number when seen through a telescope—forming a grand cluster, whose individuals are united to each other more closely than to the general mass of stars—indicate the amazing attractive energy that must be concentrated in that spot. Vast as is the distance which separates our sun from this central group—a distance thirty-four millions of times greater than the distance between the sun and our earth—yet so tremendous is the force exerted by Alcyone that it draws our system irresistibly around it at the rate of 422,000 miles a day, in an orbit which it will take many thousands of years to complete. With this new explanation how remarkably striking and appropriate does the original word for Pleiades appear! What a lofty significance does the question of the Almighty receive from this interpretation! "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?" Canst thou arrest or in any degree modify that attractive influence which it exerts upon our sun and all its planetary worlds, whirling them round its pivot in an orbit of such inconceivable dimensions, and with a velocity so utterly bewildering! Silence the most profound can be the only answer to such a question. Man can but stand afar off, and in awful astonishment and profound humility exclaim with the Psalmist: "O Lord, my God, Thou art very great!" In accordance with this higher interpretation, the influences of the Pleiades may be called *sweet*, as indicating the harmonious operation of those great laws by which our system revolves around them. In this vast and complex arrangement, not one wheel jars or creaks—not a single discordant sound disturbs the deep, solemn quietude of the midnight sky. Smoothly and silently each star performs its sublime revolutions. Although our system is composed of so many bodies—differing in size, form, and consistence—they are all exquisitely poised in space in relation to one another, and to their common centre ; their antagonistic forces are so nicely adjusted as to curb every orb in its destined path, and to preserve the safety and harmony of the whole. Moons revolve around planets, planets and comets around the sun, the sun around Alcyone, and Alcyone around some other unknown sun hid far away in some unexplored depths of our galaxy ; and grand beyond conception, this cluster of systems around the centre of ten thousand centres—the great white throne of the Eternal and Infinite ; and all with a rhythm so perfect that we might almost believe in the old poetic fable of "The Music of the Spheres." What vast and almost infinite consequences depend upon that little star, that gleams out upon us from the midnight sky, among a cluster of diamond points, itself scarcely larger than a drop of lucent dew! What profound interest gathers around it! It is a blessed thought that it is not a capricious, changeable Being who holds the helm of our universe, but the just and merciful Jehovah—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"—the Father who pitieth His children, knowing the frailty of their frames. In this vision of orbits and revolutions, more awful and stupendous than Ezekiel's vision of wheels within wheels, we see seated on the throne above the firmament, not a blind chance or a passionless fate, but one like unto the Son of Man—He whom John saw in Patmos, holding the mystery of the seven stars in His right hand—possessed of infinite love as well as infinite power—binding the sweet influences of the Pleiades solely for the order and good of His creation.—*Bible Teachings in Nature*, by Rev. Hugh McMillan, LL.D.

TAKING THE OATH.

THE primary idea of taking an oath is that we call upon the Deity to bear witness to the sincerity or truth of what we assert, and so, as it were, register our oath in heaven. When Abraham, for example, raised his hands to heaven while swearing an oath to the King of Sodom, he pointed to the supposed residence of the Creator. Afterward, when men set up inferior deities of their own, they appealed to the material images or symbols that represented them, whenever an oath was administered. The most usual form of swearing among the ancients was, however, by touching the altar of the gods. Other rites, such as libations, the burning of incense and sacrifices accompanied the touching of the altar. Demosthenes swore by the souls of those who fell at Marathon. Anciently, too, mariners swore by their ships, fishermen by their nets, soldiers by their spears, and kings by their sceptres. The ancient Persians swore by the sun, which was the common object of their adoration, while the Scythians pledged themselves by the air they breathed and by their scimitars. Descending to more modern times, the Saxons pledged themselves to support their homes and privileges by their arms ; and the punishment for perjury or non fulfilment of an oath was the loss of the hand that had held the weapon at the compact. The Spartans were wont to assemble around a brazier of fire, and, pointing their short swords to the sky, call upon the gods to bear witness to the compact. Swearing by the sword, in fact, retained its significance down to the comparatively modern times, though in a slightly modified form. Thus, while the pagans extended the point of the weapon toward the supposed residence of the gods, the warriors of Christianity, after kissing it, directed the hilt—the true emblem of their faith—to heaven. A later form of oath was the pressing of the thumb upon the blade. Gradually, however, the practice became obsolete ; and the kissing of the hilt, accompanying the words "By this good sword!" was handed down almost to the time when the wearing of a sword by gentlemen was abolished,

as one of the strictest codes of civil honour. During the Grecian dynasty, whenever an Athenian householder made an oath, he caused his children to stand before him, and, laying his hand upon their heads, prayed that a curse might fall upon them if he swore falsely. If he had no children he pronounced destruction upon himself and his whole race, while he touched the altar of the gods or the victims upon it. Going back to Biblical times we find this curious rite in connection with the lives of Abraham and Jacob. The former says to his servant Eliezer: "Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. But thou shalt go unto my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac." The like ceremony is performed by Joseph when Jacob makes him promise to carry him out of Egypt and bury him in the tomb of his forefathers. The explanation of this is, that placing the hand upon the thigh was equivalent to swearing by the Messiah, who was to spring from the loins of Abraham. Afterward the Jews confirmed their oaths by touching the book of the law, or their phylacteries, upon which extracts of the law are inscribed. The Mohammedans laid their hands upon the Koran. When, therefore, Christians kiss the Bible or lay their hands upon the tomb of a martyr, or any other sacred relic, the source whence the practice has been derived is at once recognized ; yet it must be admitted that kissing the book is a distinctly Christian institution, founded upon the kiss upon the sword hilt by the Crusaders.—*London Standard*.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

When Robertson reached the pulpit, generally, it must be admitted, a few minutes late, there was no sign of haste or flurry, but the most becoming reverence, as with deep, sonorous voice he, after the good old Scottish manner, announced and read the opening psalm. Sometimes, if a thought struck him as he read it, he would throw in a word of exposition to make the service of song more intelligent and hearty. This was a survival of another Scottish custom, now obsolete, but in which some of the old ministers greatly excelled of "pre-facing" the morning psalm. When the psalm had been sung he rose—the congregation in those early days rising with him—and with clasped hands began the morning prayer. No liturgy ever excelled the stately march of his well ordered sentences, or that deep spirit of devotion which they breathed, as with perfect freedom in the words and arrangement, he yet embraced all that should be remembered in common prayer. Then followed the reading of the Scriptures, which he generally accompanied with some comment or exposition—often the most impressive and instructive part of the service.

After another psalm or hymn, came the sermon. He did not read it, neither did he deliver it *memoriter*, but though every sentence was prepared, and every thought represented by some marking, more or less legible on the manuscript before him, he spoke as one who was at the moment in communion with the truth, and setting it forth as it revealed itself to him. I once asked him, with reference to a powerful description I had heard him give of the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, how he had given it. He said that he had called up the scene before him. The Church, the listening congregation—everything was for the time out of sight, and he was looking on at the procession of the tribes through the depths, simply telling what he saw. The effect of his preaching may be judged of by the testimony of two men of widely different temperament, when they had heard him for the first time. One of these was Dr. Andrew Somerville, the Foreign Mission secretary of the United Presbyterian Church, a man of great shrewdness and intelligence, but entirely unimaginative. He had been assisting at the communion services at Irvine, and on his return to Edinburgh, met Mr. James Robertson, who asked him what kind of sermon William had preached. "Sermon!" was the reply, "it was not a sermon at all ; it was an epic poem." The other was Dr. John Service, himself a preacher of no mean distinction in after years, but then a student of theology. He wrote to the friend on whose recommendation he had gone to hear Robertson, that the sermon had sent him away in the same mood, as the Campsie fiddler, who having heard Paganini, hastened home and thrust his own fiddle into the fire.—*Life of Rev. W. B. Robertson*.

CHURCH ROUNDERS.

In every great city there are a multitude of people who may be called "rounders," who go to church when it is convenient, and are at hand early and late to get good seats. They have no church ties, and care only for the pleasure of sitting with well dressed people, and listening to the music and the sermon. They take no part in the services, and often sit half upright in prayer, and show by irreverence and conversation that they have no sympathy with the spiritual worship and teaching of the place. These persons fill the places which rightfully belong to the reverent and pious strangers who are in every city on the Sabbath, and it is in a large measure due to this class of attendants upon public worship that Christian visitors find such scant accommodations. It may be said that they have souls to be saved and minds to be instructed, but in many cases it is taking the children's bread and giving it to the dogs, to spend effort and eloquence upon them. They live in the city, and there is no reason why they should not identify themselves with a congregation, bear a part of its burdens, and do some of its duties ; but this they do not desire. They will be found wherever a famous preacher from abroad is to preach, and on all church festivals they come in crowds to the special services or the decorated church, just as they would fill a music hall or a theatre if it cost nothing. And some of them have money enough to lavish on finery and jewels, and make plain Christians ashamed of their company by their foolish and extravagant display. The plain, poor man, who is eager to worship in spirit and in truth, has a better claim to a seat in a sanctuary than they, but his modesty stands little chance when these intrusive and urgent vagabonds assert their claims and push themselves forward as if they owned the place.—*New York Observer*.