### The Organ Voluntary.

Will some one of your readers, better informed than I happen to be in ecclesiastical history, tell us all seriously what are the *origin* and *object* of the "voluntary" now so common and prominent in our public services of the Lord's day? So far as I have been able to ascertain from church history within my reach, instrumental music was not tolerated in Christian worship before the seventh century, and then it was sanctioned (as infant baptism had been three centuries previous) by the Pope. In the thirteenth century—the very darkest period of the "dark ages"—it received again formal Papal sanction. Can this indeed be the highest and most ancient authority to which this aesthetic portion of "divine worship" is traceable? Were we drifting? It seems to me that this matter of devotion by the agency of mechanism is a matter well worth the careful examination and prayerful discussion of our Associations.

The origin of an institution so very prominent as the first and last sounds in the devotional service of the most influential town and city Baptist churches (pretending to be *par excellence* THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST in primitive doctrine and practice), ought to be traceable to pretty high authority.

The peculiar title, "Voluntary," I suppose indicates that the presiding musician may either give or withhold that part of the service, as he or she may feel disposed at the time; or does it mean that the music itself is the melodious outflow of spontaneous inspiration? This much, I presume, I can guess; but I can't settle the question of the origin of the "sweet and solemn sounds" so satisfactorily. Hence my desire for information.

The object of the "voluntary"—I now refer especially to what is called the "opening voluntary"—is, I understand, to soothe and solemnize and de-secularize the minds of the congregation preparatory to their engaging in the worship of God. This solemnizing and soothing process goes on for period varying from three to ten minutes, according generally to the size of the church edifice and the cost of the organ. In one case I remember where the edifice had cost $100,000, and the organ about $9,000, and was manipulated by a genius bearing the title of Mrs. D., the process occupied nearly twenty minutes. In connection with this somewhat phenomenal case amongst Baptist churches, I recollect one elderly lady who made it a point of religious duty to be seated in her pew fifteen or twenty minutes before the appearance of the pastor in order to get herself sufficiently solemnized. She herself assured me that the spiritual benefit she derived from the introductory voluntary, while the congregation were slowly gathering, was very great—so great indeed as often to supersede any edification derived from the rest of the service! How this worthy woman could, or how any intelligent being can, be so much benefited morally and spiritually by mere musical atmospheric vibrations, expressing no definite idea or sentiment is, to my obtuse understanding, incomprehensible. A hundred times have I sat listening to the sound waves of the voluntary, now rising and then suddenly falling, now profoundly groaning; and then unexpectedly squeaking like the incantations of Endor's witch, but what the sounds suggested I never could tell, although I happen to be fairly well endowed with the faculty of imagination. The ordinary "Opening Voluntary" sounds to me, if I may speak plainly, a fantastic and unpremeditated mixture of "Scots wha hae," Luther's "Old Hundred," a few fragments from Handel's "Messiah" or "Creation," enlivened and relieved now and then with a scrap from "Artaxerxes," or an occasional bar from some negro melody, always terminating with two or three long-drawn exhausted groans; while the standard "Dismissal Voluntary" bears unmistakably close affinity to music fitted for regulating the "tripping of the light fantastic toe." This "dismissal" music, if it has any definite meaning at all, is, I suppose, intended to express the congregation's grateful sense of relief at being released from the pew and the preacher, and allowed to return to the pleasures of secular chatter and the enjoyment of a leisure—by lunch or a specially good dinner. Music has no signification at all, if the exultant and often rollicking strains of the "Dismissal Voluntary" do not very plainly indicate joyous deliverance from oppressive restraint. How appropriate! How intelligently do our embryo Beethovens and Wagners grasp the situation!

Whether right or wrong in my impressions and inferences, I have felt I know not how frequently, that if the congregation would honestly try to be all seated four or five minutes before the usual invocation, and spend those few minutes in absolute sacred silence, each one trying to ask from himself an answer to such simple questions as,—What have I come here for? Is the heart-searching God of heaven really present? What particular sins and failings have I to lament, and what special benefits do I personally need? Whose word am I about to hear?—oh, what a useful, what a blessed and profitable five minutes would these be! Such kind of introspective self examination I do not believe possible if accompanied and disturbed by the maundering vagaries of a "voluntary." Hence I endeavor in self defence to arrive too late for the voluntary; for the spectacle of a congregation of apparently sensible people, passively undergoing this preliminary process of "soothing and solemnizing" is to me always unaccountable and sometimes even dangerously ludicrous.

Thirty years ago when domestic musical instruments were much scarcer than they are now, there might have been, perhaps, some sort of imaginable excuse for giving the people a little harmless musical mellowing on Sundays; but these are days of almost incessant musical (?) noises—piano and reed organ noises, from which many of us long to escape. Not in cities only, but even in our smallest towns and villages we have "instruments" in our homes that are fingered, perhaps, two or three times every day; next door there is likely to be a piano (all out of tune) kept going, at least fourteen hours a week, while right across the street a cheap organ of noisy quality emits discordancy every now and then, to say nothing of the wretched peripatetic organ grinder or the terrible local flute and brass band. In these environments of super-abundant and incessant musical visitations, (and I have not yet mentioned the Salvation Army,) might it not be both good taste and Christian charity to let us enjoy the mercy of blessed silence in the sanctuary?

These remarks I make, Mr. Editor, with the hope that some one who honestly believes in the value of "voluntaries" will generously tell us why they should find place in any church, and especially in our churches which claim so loudly direct apostolic sanction and example for the simple character of their worship.

J. DENOVAN.

### The Theological Margin.

Underlying current discussion upon questions more or less theological in their bearing, there is one which must sooner or later come to the surface. It is a question as to a possible margin, not alone for preachers, but also for teachers in theological seminaries and elsewhere, to be conceded as a margin for free and open inquiry. Up to this time, and more or less among all denominations styled orthodox, either the formal statement of the recognized creed, or the understood faith of the denomination, partially, though not wholly, embodied in articles defining the conditions of church-membership, have been recognized as hard-and-fast lines over which it must be hazardous for any man to step, even with a view, simply, to inquire what may lie beyond. Is there to be some modification of this rigor? and if so, under what conditions?

It is, of course, a question not to be settled off hand. And if an affirmative answer be given, it should be with certain vital matters very carefully guarded. The "liberal" school of thinkers upon this subject are simply theological anarchists. If their ideas were to have general adoption, there would be in all that realm of human thought and faith where one must deal with matters of infinite import, precisely the same conditions of things as that which the anarchistic school of socialism proposes for society and for government. Man is not such a being as that he may safely be allowed to act as he pleases under all circumstances; neither is he such a being as that, with a free rein given to his thinking and his utterance upon all subjects, he may be expected to deal always as he should with great matters which involve the eternal welfare of others as well as himself. "The right of private judgment," in matters of opinion—certainly, just as there is the right of free individual action. Yet in the one case as in the other there are to be limitations.

It is a remarkable fact, commonplace as the statement of it may be, that the Bible is a book to be studied and interpreted. It is possible to conceive Divine Revelation as in a form that should neither call for study, nor demand interpretation,—at most what should be necessary to a right reading of the mere words of the record. It did not please God to give it us in that form. Upon the contrary, there is no book which has been so put into a reader's hand *wide open*, as is the Bible. It is meant to be studied and interpreted. Hence, along with the commanding character of the revelation itself, the marvelous power of the Book in point of stimulus to the whole intellectual and moral nature of man. There was a certain hazard in giving the Bible to the world in this way, just as there was an immense hazard in endowing man himself with moral freedom. Yet out of the wide-open character of the Book, and the moral freedom of the Man, God brings wonderful results to pass. The thing at stake is to so "occupy" the human privilege in the one case as in the other, as that we shall be "workers together *with* God," and not *against* Him.

The subject we have in hand, as to what we call the theological margin—a margin for admitted free inquiry upon questions allowed to be "open" questions—becomes of more importance and significance, as in the progress of human knowledge new light arises upon various matters, and among them, perhaps, some which at an earlier date were regarded as finally and for all time determined. Let it be some of those points which our Presbyterian brethren have had in hand while discussing the desirableness or otherwise of a revision of their doctrinal standards. Or let it be some question as to books of the Bible. Must it be assumed that the authors of the Westminster Confession spoke the very last word, and for all time the authoritative word, upon such doctrines as that of the divine sovereignty in human salvation, or that of "elect infants?" Are the results of research in lines of Biblical criticism for a century past to absolutely go for nothing, and must we say that no one of those books of the Bible in its literary form which have so long been traditional, is to be even called in question? Or, upon the other hand, is there to be an admitted marginal range, as regards doctrinal statement and Biblical adjustment at the literary point of view, where the scholar, the teacher, and the preacher as well, shall feel himself simply put upon his honor as one bound to deal in all solemn earnestness and fidelity with what comes before him; not through any paltry ambition to make a sensation, nor as daring to "handle the word of God deceitfully," but as aiming simply to do his whole duty as in the sight of heaven?

It is a question so important in its practical bearings that we attempt nothing more, here, than simply its suggestion. An American scholar and teacher is soon to come before an ecclesiastical judicature for trial upon a matter of heresy. What shall the word "heresy" mean in his case? What measure of liberty, if any liberty at all is to be allowed the Christian scholar in dealing with questions which confront him, not through any will or choice of his own, but simply because the very atmosphere which as a Christian scholar he must breathe, is full of them? To what extent shall every such question as those with which he must deal, now stand upon its merits, and be tried, not at a tribunal of human judgment, set up two and a half centuries ago, but in the light of the Christian intelligence of to-day?

We are not indifferent to the significance of such questions as these, but they may as well be asked, since answered they must be, sooner or later. We stand, on our own part, for the whole, unmutilated Bible as the word of the living God. We hold that the Christian *consensus* of centuries as to even questions of date and authorship, is not to be set aside upon trivial grounds; that the doctrine of inspiration is not to be diluted until the rich flavor it has had so long shall be clean gone out of it; that in matters of Christian doctrine generally, the testimonies of the past are not to be set aside as utterances of mere ignorance and bigotry. Yet if that "new light from the word of God," of which one of those ancient men was accustomed to speak is now "breaking forth," and there are those who can show us what it is, and in what direction it leads, we claim for them, where personal conditions in their case justify confidence, that they shall have opportunity and a hearing.—*Christian Standard.*

### The Peril of the Soul from Absorption.

Perhaps there never was a time when so many things absorbed the attention and interest of so many people, to the exclusion of Christ and salvation. The sources of diversion are numerous, and many of them have the grip of a giant. The age is intensely active, restless, aggressive. Every power of body and mind is taxed to its utmost. Invention, business, enterprise, are all great captains, whose trend is heard in every direction. There is not only great ambition to do, but a burning, consuming lust to acquire. Money is a noble servant; properly used it is an instrument of great good; but when the love of it becomes master, it is as merciless as the grave. When a man's heart and eyes and hands and brain are all absorbed in the accumulation of money, the stones on the street have as much ear for the Gospel as he. As easily might you hope to arrest the winds that blow, or the dashing streams of a mountain flood, as this man. He has no time to think, nor to care about his soul. Why should he be thus concerned, as long as business is prosperous and dividends are good? He is absorbed, sucked up into the sponge of the money greed, until there is nothing of him to appeal to. Poor, wilted, lost soul! Unless something out of the usual order overtakes and brings this man to a halt, leads him to awake and come to himself, he will go on content in his delusion until the sudden burst of eternal things opens his eyes, just when death is closing them, and eternity parts its portals to reveal a rejected Saviour.

The greatest evil that can befall a man who suffers himself to be wholly absorbed with money-getting is success. When a man is making money and loves it, he has no sense of dependence. He is satisfied. Others may be in danger, but he is safe. That is the time of his peril. On that hidden rock in life's sea many a one has run his bark and gone down. It is a mercy when God shatters the bubble and turns the poor soul from the boast that it has need of nothing, to the humble confession thot it has need of everything. To the love of money and its power to absorb the whole man may be attributed the useless life and final loss of many souls in this day of ours.

But this money seeking is not the only source of absorption in our day. Society, with all its train of follies, is another, parade and sham and exactions of society, what a tyranny it is! How its enchanted victims step to its bidding! They are verily captured as prisoners in war. They are as verily in chains as were slaves when sold to the highest bidder. Take the superficial, fussy, pretentious thing out of many lives, and what will be left? Think of the waste of time, of money, of gifts and opportunities, for which fashionable society is responsible. It is kin to money-love. You cannot join its bannered ranks without money, and when your money is gone it strikes your name from the roll. Preach the gospel to these with hope of success! They seldom hear and when they do, there is no beauty in it that they should desire it. It is a dreadful destroyer of mothers and daughters, of young men, of not a few husbands and wives. As long as society, with its tribute to pride, and its occasion for indulgence, commands and absorbs a soul, that soul will not be concerned about so trifling a thing as salvation, nor inclined to listen to so dry a tale as the gospel. The flesh is master, and while its poor, frail pulses throb, society will be sought and adored. Sometimes we must leave the poor creature in the burning dwelling to his dreadful fate; all approaches are cut off. What can we do with the large class who are wholly absorbed with money getting, and with the equally great number whose God is society? The approaches are all cut off. To them Christ's tears and blood are empty sentiment. Their thoughtless march is to death. Other things absorb. These lead. We can only look on and say: "God have mercy!" Reader, is it you?—*Dr. Rhodes, in St. Mark's Messenger.*

### Live Prayers.

After a prayer meeting, at which a female had been among those who spoke aloud in prayer, a person slightingly observed: "As for that woman, she could pray all night."

"Yes," replied a devout friend, "and I do not doubt that she has often done so."

This was a first-rate reply. Of how few could it have been spoken? Yet those who are so much in prayer alone are those who pray to the purpose in the assembly. You can tell the other sort, however ready their utterance. It is as per usual. It is parroty; too glib to be earnest, too professional to be deep. This kind of praying is a mist which does not wet you, a fire which does not warm you. You could sleep from "Our Father" to "Amen" under such a performance. Yet it is very good and proper. There is nothing the matter with it except that it is dead—dead as the woman's child, which neither of the two mothers cared to own in Solomon's court. O, for more living children! We mean true, crying, struggling prayers. These can only come from those who in private wrestle and weep and prevail.

An occasional breakdown is very refreshing. To observe a heart too full to express itself with the tongue is most arousing to the soul. O, that some of our brethren would or could break down! They are too far gone in routine to be able to rise into the natural, much less into the spiritual. While such machines press like a nightmare on our prayer-meetings, things cannot much improve. O, for a deliverance!—*Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.*

### Trifles Light as Air.

BY WILLIAM MATHEWS, LL. D.

PELTING WITH PRECIOUS STONES.

A brilliant critic, in reviewing some years ago a lecture by an eminent New Englander, remarked that he overwhelmed the devotees of sensuality of all sorts with a shower of stones, and adds: "But what precious stones they are! Diamond, ruby, and sapphire with him are ordinary missiles, and the meanest among his projectiles is a carbuncle, or a Scotch pebble, at the least. Our apprehension is, that the objects at which this brilliant artillery is aimed, may take so much pleasure in the sight and sound as not to mind the sense. The danger is, that they may stand stock still to be shot at, in mute admiration of the splendid weapons with which they are assailed, saying in their hearts with Phœbe, in 'As you Like It,'—

'Sweet sir, we pray you chide a year together,
We had rather hear you chide than another woo.'"

Is not the effect of some "brilliant" sermons, denunciatory of sin or sins, similar to that here felicitously described? Is not the dazzling fence of the rhetoric often enjoyed by men who remain insensible to the warnings of the preacher,—the glitter of the blade admired by many who, absorbed in this admiration, do not feel its point? Such spiritual weapons might be commended, if their effects were like those of the magnificent ones used by the soldiers in Rome, when, in A. D. 537, it was besieged by the Goths under Vitiges, and defended by the heroic Belisarius. The mole or sepulchre of Hadrian, now the castle of St. Angelo, was then converted for the first time to the uses of a citadel. It was covered with the white marble of Paros, and decorated with the statues of gods and heroes; and these masterpieces of art, the works of Praxiteles and Lysippus, were torn from their lofty pedestals and hurled into the ditch on the heads of the besiegers, who were defeated with great slaughter, and compelled to raise the siege.

THE RESULTS OF A FALL.

In reading the biographies of eminent men, one is often surprised to learn what little things, sometimes but a feather's weight, turn in their youth, or even infancy, the scale of their destiny. A severe fall is not a little thing; but it is remarkable that such an accident, when he was a child at nurse, should have changed Talleyrand's character and entire career. But for the seemingly unfortunate event, he would have been, instead of the consummate statesman, preeminent by his exquisite tact, his finesse and dexterity, as well as daring, simply a noble of the old *regime*. Indolent, voluptuous, and profligate, he would have ended his days in exile, or, more likely, under the knife of the guillotine, and European history, which his genius so powerfully shaped, would have been utterly unaffected by his influence. It is said that, according to the traditions of his house, Talleyrand should have been a soldier; but that a cripple could not be, and he was informed that his birthright would be transferred to his younger brother. "Why so?" demanded the boy. "Because you are a cripple," was the cold blooded reply. Whatever of good might have existed in his original nature, these words, says a writer, crushed out; "the flavor of their bitterness lingered in his heart unto the last days of his life. From the hour in which they were spoken, his disposition gradually changed; he became taciturn, callous, and calculating; a cynic, a heartless debauchee, sparing neither man nor woman that stood in the path of his interest or his pleasure. He had not been spared, why should he spare others? It was not for nothing, he earned thereafter the title of *le diable boiteux*."—*Chicago Standard.*

### "Rest, But Do Not Loiter."

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

The junction of Fleet street and Farringdon street, at the foot of Ludgate Hill, is one of the most crowded thoroughfares in London. Two tides of travel meet there; the one pouring towards the Bank of England and the commercial quarters, the other pouring towards Blackfriar's Bridge and the Surrey side of the Thames. In the centre of that junction, between two lamp posts, there used to be a solid oaken bench or "settle," with a high back; and on that back was the inscription "*Rest, but do not loiter.*" On that hard bench, thousands of people in the course of every day used to rest their weary limbs. The errand boy stopped with his parcel, the sad faced seamstress with her bundle of finished work, or the bright youngster of the "Shoeblack Brigade" took his seat there a moment when on the look out for some customer for a "shine up." Lest the little oasis should become clogged up with boys and bundles and beggars, the notice was written up in large letters, "*Rest, but do not loiter.*"

That plebeian bench for tired wayfarers may not be there to-day, but in former years I have halted there, and have thought to myself, What a capital motto is this for every day life! We need just such places and seasons for refreshing the body and the soul, especially in these days of rush and push and constant competitions. After the busy whirl of the week, our Heavenly Father has wisely provided that one day in seven shall be a rest-day. The last time that I met Mr. Gladstone, he said to me, "Amid all the pressure of public cares and duties, I thank God for the *Sabbath* with its rest for the body and the soul." One reason for the wonderful vigor of the greatest of living statesmen at the age of eighty-one, is that he has not robbed himself or his Maker of the Sabbath. But neither he or any other healthy Christian makes the Lord's day a day of lounging or of profane amusement. The load of care and toil is laid off, and the soul gets its pure refreshment and heaven-ward uplift. Like that poor man's bench in seething London, stands the unrepealed ordinance of the Sabbath, and over its blessed portals is written "*Rest, but do not lounge or loiter.*"

In these rushing times and in our rushing country, many people do not rest enough. Brain, hand, and heart are allowed but little repose or recreation. This fact may partially account for the increase of disorders of the nervous system and the multiplication of sudden deaths. The best men do not clap down "the brakes" as often as they ought. Our lamented Brooklyn philanthropist, Mr. Charles Pratt, was met by a friend at Lakewood a year or two ago, and was asked "What brings you here?" The pathetic answer was, "My doctor says I must quit work for a while or die; I don't want to die, but I don't see how. I *can* quit work." That over busy and benevolent life is ended; perhaps more rest might have prolonged it. A fair question for every Christian to ask himself is, Ought I not to refresh and invigorate my life, and also to prolong it, by unbending the strained bow and taking more rest?

While many are wearing out in mind and body, there are too many who are rusting out spiritually. In every church are more or fewer who make their religion a lounge instead of a wholesome labor. They "book" for heaven in the sleeping-car. When such unfaithful slumberers are waked up at the end of the road, are they sure of a welcome at the gate, or a heaven worth having? Stopping off work must be only for recuperation, or else it is utterly demoralizing. A pastor feeling tired or temporarily discouraged, resigns his charge; ere long he is sauntering about among the churches, waiting for a call or for something "to turn up." A teacher quits the Sunday-school and says he is only going to rest awhile, but somehow or other he never gets back to his post. His "rest" has become a retreat, and he is a lounger for the remainder of his life. A fearfully large number of church members are off on furlough. As the London policeman had to start up the loiterers on that bench once in awhile, so the Lord's police may well sound in the ears of indolent Christians, "You may rest, but never loiter."

In our march heavenward, the Master has kindly provided some welcome spots for the refreshment of our souls. But they are only halting places. We come sometimes to an *Elim* with its "three score wells and palm-trees"; a delightful spot to sit down and cool off, and partake of the manna and the king's pleasant fruits. Yet it is not Canaan, and we must up and march again. Elijah cannot spend all his life under the juniper-tree. Jesus loved His disciples to go "into a desert place and *rest awhile.*" It was only for a little while. Calvary was just ahead for Him, and the Pentecostal baptism of blessed toil for them. God is very wise and very kind in providing scenes and hours of sweet refreshment during this life of varied temptations, toils, and trials. They take the *tire* out of us, cheer us up, and give us Eshchol clusters that taste of the promised land. Lest we should settle down with the fancy that these are our abiding-places, God is evermore rousing us up with the call, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest!"

That rest *remaineth* for us, a little way farther on. Heaven will not be an idle holiday, or an everlasting spirit of sacred song. There will be no lack of employment there. Instead of a holy lounging place, heaven will be a scene of such constant, pure, inspiring, blissful, and unwearing activity, that the Word of God describes it as perfect *rest*. Not an aching heart, or a tear-stained eye, or a tired foot forever and evermore!

— Dr. H. C. Mabie, when in Japan last autumn, met and had religious conversation with a young Japanese who has since been converted and has lately written Dr. Mabie the following letter, which we clip from the *Standard*:

*Rev H. C. Mabie, Boston.*

GENTLEMAN: Your kind favor of Dec. 11, last year, I duly received. I intended to write to you sooner, but I could not; for I had been suffering from a bad influenza from about the 15th of December last, and I did not find myself well until the middle of January this year. I often felt regretful for my being unable to write you at the time I received your favor, for I could not know where you were. Being told, however, that you are now in America, I write to you as an answer to your letter.

Since I saw you I realize how Christianity influences the people, and I came to the decisive conclusion that I should profess publicly a Christian before my parents and relatives and friends. Those of the latter are not Christians at all. So in my becoming Christian they would naturally censure me. At first I did not enough courage to withstand them, and I was in the middle (between) those who are Christians and those who are not Christians. But thank God! I was baptized by one of the missionaries at Osaka, and I am now preparing to meet with sneers and scoffs of those who are not Christians.

I rely up God as a strong cane when I feel unable to walk in the paths full of brambles and obstacles, as a strength when I feel weak, as a sharp sword when I encounter an enemy. How can I be coward? Not only am I preparing for attacking those who oppose themselves, but for their conversion. One of these is my brother-in-law, a very powerful man who lately became a member of the imperial Diet, and who possesses three big news offices, and yet he is not a Christian. If he is converted, indeed a thousand people shall follow his example. I am going to open a battle of pen with him. Oh, it is very fearful when I think of those days when I did not believe Christ, and it is now woe to me, as Paul said, not to preach to others. It is quite natural that when we know anything good to ourselves, we should like to tell it to others who do not yet know it.

But at first I will study the Bible and preach to others afterwards. It is not only the duty of preachers but of every body who can speak. I have many things to tell you, but my poor English cannot express my thoughts fully. O God bless you, genuine believer. Yours truly,

K. K.

Kobe, April 16, 1891.

— Puttner's Emulsion of Cod Liver Oil still retains and justifies the good opinion of the best medical practitioners. Its virtues are attested by thousands of its patrons everywhere.

— Rev. C. H. Spurgeon says that, as soon as a man loses his religion, he wants to know who Cain's wife was.

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