

Our Contributors.

THE THINGS BEHIND AND BEFORE.

BY KNOXIAN.

Paul told the Christians of Philippi that he forgot the things that were behind, and reached forward to the things that were before. He did not forget *all* the things that were behind, for we find him elsewhere repeatedly alluding to *some* things that occurred years before he wrote his letter to the Philippians. Probably his meaning is that he forgot the things that it was proper to forget.

Standing as we are now on one of time's watersheds, looking back over the past year, and vainly trying to peer into 1889, this Pauline exercise of forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward to those that are before, seems pre-eminently suitable. Should we forget all the things that are behind? Heaven forbid. We should remember a year's blessings bestowed upon us and ours. Health, home, food and raiment, reason, restraining grace, the privileges of the sanctuary, and all other blessings should be gratefully remembered. But whilst there is much to remember there may be a good deal that it is better for ourselves and others to forget. These things we should forget with all our might.

If anybody has wronged us during the year, in most cases it is better to forget all about it. It is not necessary for us to keep a mental record of all the wrongs, cruel though some of them may be, that our enemies inflict upon us. There is a record kept elsewhere, and He who keeps that unerring record will adjust matters at the right time.

Too many people have a habit of exhibiting their wounds to the public gaze. Supposing a man had a sore on his body, it would not be nice for him to exhibit his sore on the street corners, and in the stores, in the railway cars and at public meetings. Fancy a man taking the bandage off a first-class boil, and exhibiting it—not the bandage—to everybody he met. That would not help the boil, and might alienate the friends. Exhibiting a mental wound is not a much more profitable exercise than exhibiting a bodily one. Of course it is hard to suffer in silence. It tries human nature, yes, it tries even divine grace, to meet persistent attacks with dignified silence, but silence is often the best answer. Crossing the unseen line between two years, leave as many wounds as possible behind. It may not do any good to carry them over the line and exhibit them in 1889.

It may be as well to forget the *mistakes* of the old year. They may have been magnified and distorted and attributed to bad motives, but what is the use in worrying over them? Who does not make mistakes at times? The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who does nothing at all, and his whole life is a mistake. His very existence is a mistake. Paul would say that it is something worse than a mistake to feed him.

There is not much to be gained by remembering the *failures* of the past year. Trying anything a certain number of times implies a certain number of failures with every man except Mr. Mowat. He is the only man that succeeds every time.

Here is a brother who worked hard on a sermon that he meant to be a good one. He found out the exact meaning of the text, got a lot of real good matter,—nobody's business where, as long as he made it his own before he used it,—arranged his matter in logical order, lighted it up with good telling illustrations, and got himself and the sermon ready for action. He expects to have a good time in the pulpit, but instead of "taking fire and rising higher," he gets colder and sinks lower. He drags along like a canal horse, and the most exasperating feature of the performance is that he does not know what is the matter with him. Perhaps some person worried him just as he was going into the pulpit. Possibly, after he got in, his eye rested on somebody who had been worrying him during the week. He may have been compelled to consider at the last moment whether a certain "notice" should be given out or not, and to make out a mental reckoning of the number of people who would be offended if he gave it out, and the number who would be if he didn't. This is a delightful exercise for a minister when he is about to speak to the Triune God in his invocation prayer. It is a common exercise in the pulpit and vestry, and is used by the Devil to spoil more good sermons than perhaps any other. It has done ten thousand times more harm than the entire sanctification theory. The best of sermons may be made comparative failures by any one of a dozen things that may happen an hour before a minister gets into his pulpit or during the first ten minutes after he goes in. The better the preparation the more easily is the service spoiled. A finely-tuned piano is much more easily spoiled than the big drum of the Salvation Army. The more highly a sensitive preacher is tuned up—and all good preachers are sensitive—the easier it is to ruin his service.

But, come from what cause they may, what is the use in worrying over even occasional pulpit failures? Let them be forgotten, except in so far as they can be utilized for future successes. When Talmage was preaching his first sermon, a fly went down his throat and spoiled the work. He says he didn't know what course to pursue with that fly. There was no precedent to show whether he should swallow the animal, or eject it, or try to go on with it in his throat. The Synod of Dort, he says, had given no deliverance on such questions. What a fool Talmage would have been had he worried for a year or two over that fly.

Past *wrongs*, past *mistakes*, past *failures* and several other past things are better forgotten. We had intended saying something about reaching forward to the things that are before, but time is up.

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Compliments of the season to the many friends who have paid this corner of the paper a weekly visit during the past year, and a thousand thanks for many words of appreciation and encouragement. Happy New Year, friends, one and all.

EVANGELIZATION IN FRANCE.

The Rev. Mr. Dardier, of La Société Evangelique of Geneva, who some time ago visited Toronto, gave me a letter which he had received from a colporteur in France, the chief field of the Society's labours. The thought that if it were translated it might be interesting to the Christians of Canada, I have fulfilled his wish, the result of which is the following:

Elders Mills.

T. F.

The interest which you take in this work of God in my country leads me to give you briefly some news concerning it. In the church in which I labour we have had great encouragement this year. Notwithstanding the furious opposition of the priests, we have taken from them nearly a score of families, which have joined themselves to our Church, and, in earnest, entered on the path of life. The movement began after the funeral of two miners who were killed. During the service we made an appeal, and some souls were touched. Two young men, in particular, gave up their worldly habits, attended our meetings, and by conversation with each other and the reading of the Bible, found the peace of God to keep their hearts in the midst of the dangers which constantly threaten their bodies.

On the occasion of another funeral,—that of two old men who died almost at the same hour, in the same faith and joy in Christ,—we spoke before a great number of Catholics, of the death of the righteous, and his glorious hope. The last days of one of the old men were a perpetual feast. He lived in a miserable cottage, and the room which contained his bed was so small and low that I could not sit, and I had difficulty in going in by the door. It was too low for one to stand upright. Yet what a glorious abode! It was the dwelling of the King of kings. There Christ revealed Himself, spoke, and laid hold on hearts by the testimony of our brother, which was so powerful. I never saw before such a strong and glorious proof of the reality of Christian happiness.

I have thus described the impressions made on me in the chamber of this aged brother who was so ill-used by fortune, and so privileged by God. In the burying ground, at the edge of the grave, the contrast between the ruin of the body and the wondrous elevation of the soul, was striking. The other old man wrote on a piece of paper, as all he had to give to the pastor,—Psa. xvi. 11: In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." My heart was full of these testimonies. God blessed my word after He gave me it. As we were going out, a Protestant said: "That was not a burial. It was a banquet." Catholics added: "That is not death." At first, three Catholic families joined themselves to the Church. They were followed by two others. What gives us hope is the eagerness which these converts show to come to hear the Gospel, and the thirst which they manifest for the word of God. They read it every day, during all their spare moments. They are greedy to know and understand it.

We have still more interesting instances of the work of God in hearts. I have been told that a woman who was accustomed to attend our meetings had to submit to receive blows with a stick from her husband every time that she had been at one. She persevered; she found rest to her soul, and she won over her husband to a certain degree, for he consented that I should visit him in his house.

Again, there is a man who has been the means of leading his wife to Christ. At first he was a thoroughly worldly man, a gambler, a lover of the tavern, without God, one who never went to church. A year ago he began coming to hear the Gospel; he continued, and found the way of salvation. From that time one could see him often reading the Bible and other religious books. One could hear him singing hymns before his wife and his father-in-law, who were Catholics. His conduct abroad and at home was wholly changed. He had two children to be baptized. His wife, though a Catholic—moved by the change in her husband—had them baptized in the Protestant Church. And soon she herself was won over to the Gospel. She was once a bigoted Catholic; she became a servant of Christ. Now she astonishes even the Protestants by her love to the Saviour. She has, besides, passed through the fire of persecution. His father-in-law, in whose house she stayed, tormented her in every way, and ended by driving her out with her family. She remained steadfast, and is quite joyful on account of the lot which God has assigned her.

These triumphs of the Gospel have put the priests into a fury, and in the nuns' schools some little scenes have taken place which clearly show the spirit of Rome. Converted women removed their daughters from them. When the mothers went for them their effects—books, copy-books, etc.,—were refused them. The good nuns had fits of holy rage, and called them names too disgraceful to put on paper here. Then they said to them that Satan had driven them to the Protestants. They replied that it was the Spirit of God which had won them.

Among these women who were ill-used by the nuns, there was one who was specially so. She attended all the Catholic services, and was on every account worthy of esteem and respect. Her daughter was one of the first, if not the first, in the nuns' school. But lo! one day she comes to our meeting, listens, and is converted. She continues to attend. The priest hears of it, he cries lustily, it is said that he even wept. They came for her, she replies that now she is enlightened. The nuns

become angry. Then they entreat her to, at least, leave her daughter with them. The mother is immovable, the daughter must leave the school. The prizes are about to be given, that is of little consequence. Instead of being in her place at the distribution of the prizes, she will go to the Protestant Church. Her name will be struck off the roll. The nuns, the good Catholics, return to the charge. They entreat her, then they abuse her. All around this woman is drawn a net work of persecutions. To those who urged her, she mildly said in answer, "If you should set before me a tub full of gold, and offer me it instead of what I now have, I would not change." She was very happy, and so joyful, that it gave her great pain not to see her husband of the same mind. But God wrought on him also. When his wife was not there he took the Holy Gospel and read in it. His wife, when she looked through the window, saw him several times in this attitude. She did not go in, in order not to disturb him, and to give him time to lay hold on something. At night he also prayed. At last he agreed to a meeting for edification being held in his house. But his comrades found it out. They began by ridiculing him, then they drove him from his work. He belonged to an association of workmen, who, for the sake of greater gain, undertook work together. They would have no more to do with him. However, he continued steadfast, and now he comes regularly to church. His wife says that she would far rather endure privations than see her husband far from God, and without hope.

We are doing a work among the miners in black and low-sized houses in which the light of the Gospel shines, however, with enlivening strength. Please think on us and recommend us to the Christians of America. People often forget us because we have some connection with the State, but we have also a committee and we cause expense. We are struggling in a Catholic country against a powerful clergy. We ask the sympathy the prayers, and the gifts of more favoured Christians. If you have an opportunity of speaking of us, say that in a country of darkness, the theatre of all kinds of troubles, where sickness and hunger frighten us on all sides, we reckon on the support of all those who labour for the glory of Christ.

GOSPEL WORK.

TESTIMONY.

After a sermon I had been preaching in a university town, a student came up to me and said, "I feel that I can speak to you; will you permit me?"

"Certainly," I replied; "come at once."

"No," said the young man, "thank you. I must be in college at nine o'clock; but, if you will allow me, I will call upon you to-morrow morning."

We made an appointment, and punctually to the time the young man made his appearance, looking very miserable. He sat down, and at once told me how unhappy he was. He said, "I have lost my light and my joy."

I replied, "We do not naturally have light and joy to lose."

"Oh, yes, I know that," rejoined the young man, "but I mean to say, I have had great joy; but it has all gone."

I said, "Now I understand you. Do you mind telling me how you received the joy you refer to?"

He readily complied with the request, and began his own story.

He gave me to understand that he was the son of believing parents, and that he came up to the university a steady well-disposed man. He did not waste his time, as far too many do, in idle amusements, or dissipation; but, on the contrary, applied himself diligently to his books.

Being thus engaged all the week, it was his custom on Sundays to go out for a long walk in the afternoon.

He said, "Upon one occasion, as I was passing a certain church, I heard the two bells ringing. They seemed to my ears to say, Come in, come in, come in. I looked towards the church, but could see no one; also up and down the street, but not a person was approaching. Yet the bells pleaded on as distinctly as before, Come in, come in."

"As I walked forward the thought came to my mind, Why do you not come in? I come in? No, I am going for my walk. I have been reading hard all week, I have been to college chapel this morning, and intend going to church again this evening; I am going for my walk now."

"Still the bells went on with their distinct Come in, come in. No, I said, I am going for a walk, I cannot; but the bells seemed to say more vehemently than before, Come in, come in, come in. I said, I won't, striking the ground at the same time with my stick. That very instant the bells stopped."

"It was foolish of me, you will say, but I could not help myself; I was all of a tremble, and felt inclined to turn back and go into the church. However, I rallied myself, and set out resolutely for my walk, inwardly saying, I will not be so superstitious. For all this, I was obliged to return, and go into church."

"It was rather late, as you may suppose; but I took a seat near the door, and joined in the service."

"As the curate was reading the second lesson, he looked off his book straight at me, and uttered the words, 'By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast' (Eph. ii. 8, 9). I heard no more, and cannot describe to you the effect those words had upon me. I was, as it were, arrested, I trembled, and fell upon my knees. 'By grace . . . through faith . . . not of works.' These words convicted me. Hitherto I had been trying to lead a good life in order to go to heaven; but all that was brought to an end now. Before the service was over I was as happy as I