

The Lebanon and Smyrna Meeting-House.

BY LATHAN A. CRANDALL.

It was not Lebanon of Syria, or Smyrna of Asia Minor; but sister townships in central New York, each bearing a historic name. The meeting-house stood near the line which marked the boundary between the townships; hence the double-barreled appellation. It was in the country; not a country village or hamlet, but out among the farms, where one road intersected another. Just across the way stood a weather-beaten school house, in which the writer's young ideas were trained to shoot. A brook gurgled past the school-house, and in that brook were trout; but that is another story. The two incidents connected with those school days which stand out most distinctly, are a fierce fight between the teacher and the big boys in which sticks of wood were used as weapons, and a disgraceful attempt on the part of the minister's son to spell "woolly" with one "l." The attempt met with serious objection on the part of the teacher, and the mortified boy lost his place at the head of the class and gained a chunk of experience which has lasted him to this day.

But we are getting away from the meeting-house, even though it is only across the road. In architecture it belonged to the utilitarian period. When the problem is simply to get the most room for the least money, the solution will take the form of a rectangular building without frills. It had been painted white, and, I think, retained its coating fairly well. If there was any tower or steeple, memory does not reproduce it. An uncovered porch stretched across the front of the building, serving at once as horse-block and foyer. It was on this porch that the minister's son of a Sunday was publicly disgraced. He had reached the mature age of seven years, and was wearing for the first time a suit of velvet, black with red spots, made by the cunning hands of his mother. If there was ever a handsomer suit or a prouder boy, history has failed to record the fact. He felt old, large, a man. Standing there in all his majesty, with hands in his pockets—yes, there were pockets—looking down in compassion on his boy friends who had no velvet suits all at once, and without warning, a woman kissed him. "What a fall was there, my countrymen!" Down he came from his pedestal, for that kiss was the indubitable evidence that he was still only a little boy.

Just to the north of the meeting-house were the sheds where the farmers hitched their horses during church time, and where the school children played on week days. It was shady and cool there even in the hot summer weather, and after the noon lunch had been interviewed, what feats of skill and daring were performed on the upper beams. Gymnasium work was not a part of the prescribed course in that school, but we took it all the same. We wrestled and jumped and ran races, and fought a little now and then, just to keep life from becoming monotonous.

But here we are lingering in the horse sheds when we ought to be in church. By the way, that was just what the young men—and some of the older ones—were accustomed to do of a Sunday morning. They gathered under the sheds and talked horse and crops and politics, until they heard the first notes of the opening hymn, and then filed into church. They sat on the north side, for the south side was given over to the women. Small boys sat with their mothers, and it was a great day when the small lad was graduated to the men's side of the house. The first Sunday after the minister's son attained to this high dignity, he chose a seat in close proximity to a boy friend of about his own age. The sermon being well under way and the boy having full confidence in the soundness of his father's theology—a confidence which has never been shaken—he felt his liberty to turn his attention to other if less sacred things. At length he found employment in attempting to teach his friend how to "pick up chips." The pupil did not prove apt, twisting and untwisting his fingers in a vain attempt to get them properly adjusted. His failure was so complete and his resultant chagrin so comical, that the minister's son, forgetful of time and place, let loose a vigorous "ha! ha!" which went careering around the church much to the scandal of all present. An awful pause, and then the solemn tones of the minister were heard: "Lathan, go and sit with Deacon Lewis!" Lathan went, in a humiliation of spirit which words cannot begin to measure.

Dear Deacon Lewis! How kindly he smiled down upon the shivering boy who crept in disgrace to his side. He was "Uncle Benjamin" to every one for miles around. No one ever heard him utter a bitter word, or saw upon his face an angry look. His heart was full of love and kindness, which overflowed in good deeds done with absolute freedom from ostentation. When we were in Italy in the summer of 1901, a letter came from my father saying, "Uncle Benjamin is dead." As I read the words I saw again the old meeting-house by the brook side, and the calm, kind face of the good man who for more than four score and ten years had lived the gospel of Jesus Christ. In our Father's house, I doubt

not that he will be greatly honored, although here he was known only to the few.

The pulpit was at the east end of the house, perched high against the wall, and reached by a flight of stairs from either side. When the preacher had reached this lofty eyrie, the door at the head of each flight of stairs was closed and he was at liberty to prance about as well as he could in a space of about three feet by four. A wooden bench back of the desk took the place of chairs, and furnished a resting place during the sermon for the minister's son, on those occasions when he was honored with a seat in the pulpit. Stretched out there, the boy's vision was limited to the ceiling and his father's back, and he often killed time by speculating what would happen if he should jab his father in the bend of the knee. On one occasion speculation gave place to actual investigation—but that is still another story, and has unpleasant associations.

The gallery went around three sides of the building, and in the west end was the choir. "Uncle Hiram," possessor of a somewhat thin but sweet-tenor voice and a great love for music, led the forces. The rank and file was made up of all sorts and conditions. Some could sing and some only imagined that they could, a delusion shared by no one who heard them. After the hymn had been given out, came the "ping" of the tuning fork, a gentle humming as one after another reached after the key, and then away they swung in plaintive "Mear" or good old "Balerna." What a day it was for church music when Bradbury came. A new note was sounded; a note of gladness and rejoicing. The singers in the old Lebanon and Smyrna meeting-house caught the blessed contagion, and "Hark from the tombs" gave place to "Joyfully, joyfully, onward we move." Then the Sunday-school children began to sing. Heretofore they had endured the music; now they loved it.

Speaking of the Sunday-school brings back that class of boys in which the minister's son had a place. The school held only summer sessions, and each spring we began with, "In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness," etc., and we were expected to commit to memory seven verses each week. We had few of the aperturances which are supposed to be essential to good Sunday-school work in these days, but we had the most important thing of all—a good teacher. He seemed to us to be an old man—he may have been forty—but he knew how to win and to hold the love of his boys. The boys are all scattered now, but one of his boys, at least, has never forgotten the lessons learned from good Deacon Phelps in the little meeting-house under the hill.

Somehow one loves to linger over those days. They were not better than the present, but life was full of wonders then. What one of us will ever forget the magic-lantern exhibitions in the old church, when we sat with protruding eyes as the animals marched two by two into the ark, or the mouse ran in and out of the man's mouth? There are no picnics now such as we had then. Then we marched with flying banners, class by class, headed by a brass band, to some near by wood where tables groaned under their weight of provisions. I recall one such occasion, when the centre of the table was occupied by a small pig, roasted to a turn, and holding in his mouth an ear of corn. The poet of the day immortalized the tiny porker in this couplet:

True to the nature with which it was born,
The pig still clings to its ear of corn."

Were it not for fear of that cold-blooded editor who just aches for an excuse to pitch this whole thing into the waste-basket, I would tell about Deacon Elliot and his red bandanna handkerchief; but that is still another story.—Standard.

God as a Rewarder.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

Among all the names and attributes of our Heavenly Father that is a very endearing one that is contained in that glorious epic of faith, the eleventh chapter of the "Hebrews." We read that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. That precious promise is linked with every earnest prayer and every act of obedience. God rewards labor. Does not every farmer act in faith when he drives his plough in springtime, and drops his grain into the mellowed ground? Every minister prepares his gospel message—every Sunday school teacher conducts the Bible class, and every godly parent tills the soil of the child's docile heart, in the simple faith that God rewards good sowing with harvests.

God rewards obedience. He enjoins upon every sinner repentance and the forsaking of his sins, and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as his atoning Saviour. Every sinner that breaks off from his sins, and lays hold of Jesus Christ, does it on the assurance that our truth-keeping God will reward obedience. "By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." An unbelieving generation hooted, no doubt, at the "fanatic" who was wasting his time and money on that unwieldy vessel. But every blow of Noah's hammer was an audible evi-

dence of the patriarch's faith in the Lord as a rewarder of obedience.

God rewards believing prayer for the right things, when it is offered in a submissive spirit. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find. Humble, child-like faith creates a condition of things in which it is wise and right for God to grant what might otherwise be denied. We grasp the blessed truth that he hears prayer, and gives the best answer to prayer in his own time and way; upon these two facts we plant our knees when we bow down before him. On the long, long trials to which we are subjected, while our loving Father is testing our faith and giving it more vigor and volume! We are often kept at arm's length—like the pleading Syro-Phœnician mother—in order to test our faith; the victory comes when the Master says "be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Godly wives are often left to press their earnest petitions through months and years before the answer comes in the work of the converting Spirit. There was an excellent woman in my congregation who was for a long time anxious for the conversion of her husband. She endeavored to make her own Christian life very attractive to him—a very important point, too often neglected. On a certain Sabbath she shut herself up and spent much of the day in beseeching prayers that God would touch her husband's heart. She said nothing to her husband but took the case straight up to the throne of grace. The next day when she opened her Bible to conduct family worship, according to her custom, he came and took the Book out of her hands, and said, "Wife, it is about time I did this." And he read the chapter himself. Before the week was over he was praying himself, and at the next communion he united with our church.

Verily, God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. That praying Hannah, who said, "The grief of my heart is that of all my six children, not one loves Jesus," was not satisfied that it should be so. She continued her fervent supplications until five of them were converted during a revival. They all united in a day of fasting and prayer for the sixth daughter, and she was soon rejoicing in Christ. The victory that overcame in that case was a faith that would not be denied.

Sometimes the prayers of parents are answered long after the lips that breathed them are moulded into dust. When a certain Captain K— sailed on his last sea voyage, he left a prayer for his little boy written out and deposited in an oak chest. After his death at sea, his widow locked up the chest, and when she was on her dying bed, she gave the key to her son. He grew up a licentious and dissolute man. When he had reached middle life, he determined to open that chest out of mere curiosity. He found in it a paper, on the outside of which was written, "The prayer of M— K— for his wife and child." He read the prayer, put it back into the chest, but could not lock it out of his troubled heart. It burned there like a live coal. He became so distressed that the woman whom he was living with as his mistress thought he was becoming deranged. He broke down in penitence, cried to God for mercy, and making the woman his legal wife, began a new life of prayer and obedience to God's commandments. And so God proved to be a rewarder of a faith that had been hidden away in a secret place a half century before! I have no doubt that among the blessed surprises in eternity will be the triumphs of many a believer's trusting prayers.

My friend, if you are not a Christian, I entreat you to put the divine promise to the test. Jesus Christ's invitation to you is to "follow me." He calls on you to forsake your darling sins and offers you pardon. He calls you to self-denial, and offers you peace of conscience. He calls you to his service, and offers you more solid joys than this world can give or take away. He calls you to a clean, pure, useful life, and offers you grace sufficient for it. He calls you to follow him through sunshine or storm, up hills of difficulty; and through some sharp temptations—to follow him implicitly, gladly and heartily to the last hour of earth, and then in heaven you will acknowledge that the "God of all grace" is the eternal rewarder of all who obey him.—Religious Intelligencer.

Back to God.

BY REV. FRANCIS E. MARSTEN, D. D.

There is a deep undercurrent of thought and feeling in our time which cries out, "Back to God." Strong conviction is taking root in many earnest minds, and the shifting sands of sentiment to which so many have clung in their religious life, are not sufficient for the imperative need of the world of our day. A creeping paralysis of moral and ethical forces has been discerned by the wise. Prophecies of disaster have not been wanting. Hence the impulse to go back to the sovereignty of the divine Love and the absolute will of the Eternal of which Jesus was the expression and fullness of manifestation.

From many indications the careful student must be impressed with the presence of an approaching dog-