

Pastor and People.

I WONDER.

BY MRS S E KENNEDY

I wonder oft why you and I still grope
Alone in darkness, through a world of strife,
When close beside us waiting to be called
Stands One who fain would lead each troubled life
Into the glorious sunshine of His love,
Where reigns the peace which cometh from above.
I sometimes wonder, too, why we permit
Such trivial things as pleasure, work or care,
To come between our weary souls and Him
Who kindly listens to each whispered prayer,
We are too prone to put the best aside,
Content to walk alone in foolish pride.

Written for the CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

"THERE WAS NO ROOM."

For ages there has been a continuous stream of criticism poured upon the proprietor of that little inn at Bethlehem, just because it is said of Joseph, Mary and the Holy Babe that "there was no room for them in the inn." The critics have delighted to point the finger of shame towards that inn-keeper, as though he were a most unfeeling, selfish and mean man. And those words have often been used as a text and applied to those who would make "no room" for Christ in their hearts. These people have been told that they ought not to be so wickedly heartless towards the Saviour as that inn-keeper was. But it is high time that such criticisms of that man were called off. In the first place, how did he know that the birth of the Saviour was to occur there and then? What evidence is there to show that he had any intimation, from any authoritative source, that Mary was the expectant mother of Christ and that it was she who applied for admittance into his inn? None. In the second place, it is highly probable that all of the accommodations in the inn had been fully taken up before Joseph and Mary sought a lodging place there. There is no reason to think that the keeper would not have accommodated them just as readily as he did others, could he have done so. His inn was already full, and so the next best thing he could do was to let them have the use of the building for the cattle. Learn this: Christianity can adapt itself to any situation. It is not dependent upon fine parlors and elegant bedrooms for headquarters.

C. H. WETHERBE.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

COGITATIONS ON MALACHI.

CHAP. III : 8-10.

These may not be of much value to others. Even so. They are worth a good deal to myself. This is the chief consideration for individual members and adherents of Christian churches. Each one for himself in the particular of obligation and duty. I do not pretend to know all about "tithes" or a tithe even of what many others know. Quite sincere am I in saying so, and sure, that anything I could say has been better said thousands of times. I am, I repeat, looking at the matter for my own information and guidance. Looking, I see that of old time tithes were enjoined, were exacted, were paid, were occasionally withheld. This, too, I see that the withholding of them was accounted a robbing of God. It is a grave offence to rob any one of anything that of right belongs to him. A much graver offence it is surely to rob God. Moreover, I see that very many did not know, or affected not to know, that they were blameworthy in so doing. And they wished to know wherein they were to blame. This was a good wish, if it was sincere. They might have known, we think. It seems as if they could not have helped knowing. But then some of us perhaps do not know, or have not, as yet, considered and settled in our minds whether or not a similar obligation, which, up to this present, we have overlooked, is resting upon us. It is astonishing how unknowing we are when we do not wish to know. It is not, I fear, the perception, but the performance of duty that is so difficult to us unknowing ones. If wilful, our unknowingness is not harmless. It is a terrible thing to be "curled with a curse." When or in what form it will come I do not know and will not "predict." From

whom it will come I do know. And this also, that "the curse causeless shall not come." It gladdens one to see that a "blessing" is promised to "the bringing in of the tithes into the storehouse." We would, I presume, like to have the blessing come down and rest upon us. He who promises to bestow it, will neither forget nor fail of doing so, at the proper time and in the right way. He permits, He enjoins us to "prove" Him. Many have proved Him. The number of those who are proving Him is increasing. I have not so far heard of any of them having been disappointed, whether individuals or churches. Such a blessing! Such fullness of blessing, on mind, on heart, on home, on business, on work, on worship! We should, as the very least we can do, fairly consider and examine this question of giving to the Lord of that we have received from the Lord. That is with a view to a definite and conclusive settlement of it in our minds. Surely, in regard to a question, presenting at once a divine and human aspect, it is very wrong and very unsafe to leave our minds uninformed and unsettled. SENEX.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

PULPIT READING.

We will appreciate the power of good reading and the futility of mere droning, when we consider that many who never dream of reading a poem themselves will eagerly pay high to hear some good elocutionist render it. We are apathetic under ideas coldly imparted, however noble or vivifying they may in themselves be, but we are fired by the common-places of enthusiasm. Let an ordinary man read aloud a sermon of Spurgeon, or Chalmers, or Principal Grant, and who cares for it particularly? But who would remain unstirred under their living voices? or, indeed, under one of their sermons spoken with their spirit by anybody?

Ministers are as a rule better readers than any other class of men. They read with due decorum and solemnity and generally articulate well. But having said this, we have said almost all, for most pulpit reading seems to be very perfunctory. The Scripture lesson is part of the routine of service, and must be done with proper dignity and reverence. Few make it "piercing as a two-edged sword," or raise our spirits by revealing the grandeur of its poetry, or the sublimity of its thought; few move us to sympathy with its record of suffering, of endurance and of redemption.

The passages which are chosen to be read are generally very familiar ones; so familiar, indeed, that they have ceased to convey much meaning, and we are as having ears and hearing not. We have to make a decided effort to break through into the heart of them. The Scripture, then, will fall on apathetic ears, unless a quickened human spirit utters it—utters it as if received on the very day from the lips of God, vivid with all its early energy and fire. The message is not old and worn, just to be droned for the hundredth time in listless ears, but young, piercing and active, the very breath of life. Paul's fervour will not kindle us, unless we also hear Paul's voice. We will not hear Christ's words, unless we also hear in them Christ's spirit. Let the minister put that energy and expression into his Scripture reading which he does (if he be earnest) into his sermons, and we shall have Scripture indeed. But many seem to think that all is well if the words are uttered. When a passage is ill-read we not only do not feel its meaning or power, but we often do not get the sense. Besides we are put out of sympathy with it because of the want of harmony between the reading and the thought or feeling. The finest passage will thus be most degraded and meaningless when badly read.

Now, nobody wants fine elocution in the pulpit, or dramatic effect; we do not want to admire the reading, but what is read. All we ask is intelligent, earnest, sympathetic reading, such as any man qualified to be a minister can give if he will. Good reading not only conveys to us vividly the complete meaning of the passage read, but so exhibits the spirit of the writer that we are brought into sympathy with him, and realize fully his thought and feeling. Of all the ministers I have had the privilege of listening to, I know

of one only who has satisfied me in this respect, and the majority have perhaps better capacity of voice than he. Among the many things I have learned from Mr. M. I have learned the beauty and power of Scripture well-read. I had rather hear him read a psalm than hear most ministers preach a sermon. I remember once having had an obscure passage in Isaiah made quite clear to me simply by Mr. M.'s reading. And I know that the whole secret of his power is, that, realizing clearly the beauty and power of what he is reading, he puts his whole strength, his intellect, imagination and sympathy into it, as he does into his sermons. So it is that familiar psalms and prayers are on his lips ever new and beautiful, and pregnant with meaning.—"A Criticism from the Pew," by W. H. M.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

We cannot think of books being literally kept in heaven. Yet we read that there is a book of life out of which we are to be judged. There must be something then that corresponds to a book. What may this be? I have thought it possible that our own memory may really be that book of remembrance. But are not most of the events of life effaced from our memory long ago? Certainly they do seem to be effaced; for the most part they are not present to our consciousness. But may they not be revived? We have but a small idea of the latent power of memory. We can carry millions of events with the most perfect ease, the events which may lie buried in the depths of forgetfulness, but yet which by some curious laws of thought can be presented to our consciousness in a moment, and with a vividness that is surprising. There are suitable laws of association by which events are instantly recalled that we thought had passed from our memory forever. And who can say that the conditions may not be furnished in a future life by which every single event of our past may be recalled? That may really be the law of our being. We may find it yet as natural and easy to remember all the events of our life as we find it now to remember a few of them. More than this, we know that new scenes often awaken new powers. I remember, for instance, when I first awoke to a sense of the beautiful in nature. It occurred on a trip that I made up the Scottish lakes. All at once the glorious scenery struck a chord in my heart that had hardly vibrated before. A new sense was called into being, or at least a dormant sense was awakened. Henceforth I was alive to a sense of the beautiful as I never was before. It was the surrounding scenery that called out this dormant sense of mine into new life. Now if such is the effect of our present material surroundings, who can say what new powers may be developed in us when we come into contact with eternal scenes? And if we can be so affected now, while dominated so largely by the flesh, what enlargement and inspiration may be in store for us when we get into the realm of spirit. How vastly the power we have now may be developed then. What height and breadth and depth may be added to all our faculties. How accurate our judgment may become, how vast the sweep of our imagination, how thrilling our sense of the beautiful. And is our memory to be at fault then? Is that faculty not to be perfected with all the rest? It seems more reasonable to believe that memory will then be so quickened that it will summon up without effort all the images that have ever passed before it. Thus the tablets of our own memory may be God's Book that is receiving now the record of our life, the record that is to be opened and read before an assembled world.

Toronto.

JOSEPH HAMILTON.

SUNSHINE AFTER STORM.

All last night the storm raged and covered the trees with a coating of ice. To-day the sun broke forth and the trees sparkled with a blaze of diamonds. But for the freezing storm we should not have had this scene of splendor. As I look out of my windows at the gorgeous spectacle, I am reminded how storm and sunshine both play their part in God's wise providence and in the development of Christian character. Some of my readers may now be under the peltings of severe trial. Deep call eth unto deep, and all the waves and the billows are gone over you! It was just so with the Psalmist; but he holds fast to the helm during the hurricane, and shouts in the teeth

of the gale, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him!" Not now, but by and by, the time for singing praises will come. Others of God's children had the same experience. Abraham climbed Mount Moriah under a storm-cloud when he went to offer up Isaac, but the "clear shining after rain" came when God approved his faith, and spared the beloved son also. A long, dark night of trial did Joseph pass through; but then came the flashing splendor of his righteous exaltation. There are forty-one chapters of the Book of Job, through which beats the storm which smote "the four corners of his house;" but in the forty-second chapter the blue skies break forth in a blaze of returning prosperity.

This is the way by which our heavenly Father trains and disciplines His children. His chastisements are not for the present joyous; they are terribly grievous. Nevertheless, afterwards they yield the precious and peaceable fruits of righteousness. Be patient, my brother; God does not explain to you the mysteries of His providence; what He does thou knowest not now, or why He does it; thou shalt know hereafter. Wait and see. Hope thou in God; thou wilt yet praise Him when tears have turned to diamonds, like the rain drops on yonder trees.

If you go into an organ manufactory you will see the pieces of metal being shaped, and the wood being sawed and planed and polished. That workshop is a scene of dust and unsightly shavings and apparent rubbish. But out of that shop will yet emerge the magnificent instrument which shall fill the sanctuary with its waves of melody. It is in just such workshops of Divine providence that Hope prepares for the music of the future. She is furnishing pipe after pipe, and putting a key after key; and they will yet praise the God of love with a chorus of Hallelujahs.

God knows best when we need the drenchings of trial. Not one drop of sorrow, not a single tear, but has its heaven-ordered purpose. Christ's countenance never beams with such brightness as when it breaks forth after a deluge of sorrow. The only little daughter of a beloved friend of mine was lying at the point of death and seemingly in a sweet, quiet sleep. My friend took the physician aside and asked him, "Doctor, don't you think she will soon wake up?" "No," replied the doctor, "no, not till she wakes up in heaven!" Then the great deeps of agony were broken up in the hearts of my friend and his grief-smitten wife. By and by there came out a bit of blue sky in this assurance, "Whom I love I chasten." Then peered out another bright spot. "All things work together for good to them that love God;" and then this one, "Those whom the Father hath given Me shall be with Me." And so the sky brightened to those bereaved parents through their tears, until their souls began to glisten like yonder trees, on whose branches the raindrops have turned to flashing crystals in the sunlight. Better, stronger and more useful to others have those Christian parents become since that sore affliction: and I never have worshipped in the beautiful little church which they built as a memorial of that daughter without thinking how love can rainbow a storm-cloud.

All ye children of God who are under the pressure of poverty or the downpour of disappointments or the blizzards of adversity, "think it not strange as though some new thing had happened unto you." Millions have had the same experience. No storm ever yet drowned a true believer, or washed out the foundations of His everlasting hope. If you take trials wisely and rightly, then the "trial of your faith will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Two thoughts ought to give you courage. One is that our Lord loves to honor and reward unwavering faith. He sends the storm to test you, and then the smile of His sunshine to reward you. Such has been the testimony of all His faithful ones from the days of the tempest-tried Apostles to the present hour. Another thought is that the skies are never so crystalline as when they have been washed by a storm. The countenance of Jesus is never so welcome, so cheering, so lovable as when He breaks upon us as a sun of consolation and joy after trials. Look out of thy windows, my friend, and you will see the sparkling promises that glitter like jewels on every bough. Why is thy soul disquieted within thee? Hope thou in God; thou shalt yet praise Him when the last cloud has vanished and the last tear is dried.—*Christian Intelligencer.*