

The Pastor and People.

Perfect Through Suffering.

There is no heart, however free and lightness, But has its bitterness; No earthly hope, however bright and blissful, But ring of emptiness. The world is full of suffering and sorrow, Of anguish and despair. Its brightest promises are of tomorrow, Its mockeries are everywhere. Our weary hearts, with slow and sad pulsation, Beat to the march of years, Then days are given to toil without cessation, Their gloomy nights to tears. But let us wait in patience and submission, The will of our great King— Remembering that—all through our earthly mission, Perfect through suffering. Then cease, O foolish heart, cease thy repining, The Master's hand above Is only purifying and refining— The Alchemist is Love. These tears and thrills of woe, these great afflictions, Are but the chastening rod, And they shall prove the heavenly best, dictions, The mercies of our God. What seemeth now a dark and dreary vision, Into our tear-dimmed eyes, Shall burst in glory into scenes of elysium, A blooming paradise. Then cease, O foolish heart, cease thy repining, Hope lift thy drooping wing; The plan is one of God's all-wise designing— Perfect through suffering.

John the Baptist.

BY PROF. JAMES T. HYDE, CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

The man comes before the minister. He was of priestly descent; his father, Zacharias, being "a priest of the course of Abia, the eighth of the twenty-four courses, or classes, of the sons of Aaron, and actively engaged in the Temple Service. His mother, Elizabeth, too, having a kind of sacerdotal dignity as one of the daughters of Aaron. His parents were "both righteous," or devoutly conscientious, but not simply before men, but "before God,"—inwardly as well as outwardly righteous; and, not only as respects moral precepts, but ceremonial rights, without reproach, if not absolutely perfect; "walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless." When this can be said of both husband and wife—happy the family, and doubly happy the child. He had, however, until far advanced in years, that bitterest of sorrows to the pious Jew, from which, indeed, no mere piety is ever exempt—they were childless.

John's birth was pre-announced by an angel. While his father was burning incense, and the people were silently praying in the outer court, behold, an angel! Not a mere angelic apparition, the creature of spiritual excitement and popular superstition, but a real, celestial visitant, to announce to him what no human tongue could have foretold, and he himself could never have believed if he had listened only to the voice of his own heart. The appearance of angels had generally betokened death and destruction, but not so to the holy priest in the sanctuary. He is "troubled," as who is not in visions of things belonging to another world. But his awe is changed into joy by the assurance that his bygone prayers are not forgotten.

John's birth is in answer to prayer. No delay should discourage our faith even when we ask for temporal blessings. Is not many a good child given in answer to secret prayer?

John's greatness is predicted even from before his birth. His coming is to be an occasion of intense joy. He is to be great in God's eyes—truly great!—the only greatness recognized by the angels,—not like that of the princes and leaders and conquerors of this world, which depends chiefly on rank and talent, but as one divinely approved and honoured. His greatness is connected on the one hand with strictly temperate, or moral habits, and on the other hand with high spiritual experiences. Like a true Nazirite, he shall drink "neither wine nor strong drink," i. e., abstain from intoxicating drink, as every great and good character is built on a rigid legal or moral basis. And "he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb," showing how early a true child of the covenant may be subject to the grace of God—baptized and regenerated by heavenly grace. His greatness as a minister, too, is vividly depicted. "He shall 'turn' men, turn their 'hearts'; not only arouse, but actually convert them, and not simply to truth and duty, but to 'the Lord their God.' He shall do it in the spirit and power of Elijah—that greatest of Old Testament prophets—as a preacher of repentance, resisting, single-handed, the false gods of the age, as Elijah did Ahab and Jezebel. He shall go 'before the Lord' or the Messiah, as a herald before a king, with boldness and zeal, to 'make ready a people,' or gather a company of believers ready to welcome him. He shall do it, however, not as Elijah did, by working miracles, (for he 'did work no miracle,') but as Malachi declared should be done, and as always needs most to be done, especially in corrupt periods, by 'turning the hearts of the fathers to the children,' i. e., by reviving parental and filial piety, by bringing parents and children together, or people of all ages and relations, to repentance. Verily here is the right kind of reformer—strict in morality, holy in experience, intent on preparing the way for Christ in every family and household.

Turn now from prophecy to history. Is this picture realized?

His mother rejoices over her new-born son as a "mercy," a special mercy from the Lord. Her kindred "rejoice with her" in token of that sympathy which we need in joys quite as much in sorrows, and which overflows with congratulations. Her husband, long smitten with dumbness for his unbelief, soon as his mouth is opened, break forth in praises as if his heart were waiting

only to sing some fitting doxology. "The hand of the Lord" is upon the child from his birth—that greatest blessing for a child—the Lord's directing and favouring hand; far better, surely, than the power of any mere human parent or teacher, far better than the patronage of the noble, rich, and learned. His good old father's "Benedictus," as he cried "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," on the eve of the fulfilment of the most ancient and glorious promises in the world's history, laying the greatest stress on God's proving faithful to his covenant, putting out his thankfulness in words which reveal the deepest insight into the mission of his infant son as the forerunner of our Lord, how can we, who live in the full light of the Gospel ever appreciate?

John was prepared for his great work in the school of solitude. For "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel." This means that from childhood to manhood he was developed both physically and spiritually in the wilderness. Not that "his restlessness had driven him" into it, as the author of "Kece Homo" says. Nor did he lead a "cloistered" life, as some advocates of the monastic system imagine. But like many of the world's purest saints and best benefactors, like Moses, Elijah, David, Paul, Luther—nay, like our Lord himself, he was called, trained, disciplined, ordained in comparative solitude. He acquired that strength for life's terrible conflicts which comes only from a spare diet, and austere habits, and untroubled contemplation, and lonely communings with God. Bishop Horne insists that "he who desires to undertake the office of guiding others in the ways of wisdom and holiness will but qualify himself for that purpose by first passing some time in a state of sequestration from the world, where he may grow and wax strong in spirit until the day of his showing unto Israel." In modern life we are not so much in danger of a narrow and morbid asceticism, as of a busy, bustling agitation, in which there is nothing but a weak, languid, jaded heart; no reality in religion, no rest in God, no deep convictions, no vivid emotions, no stern voice of duty, no sweet and fresh ardor of devotion, no great power in things unseen and eternal, no fit preparation for active usefulness. More than ever, perhaps, must those who would be ready and mighty for public work retire as into a desert, and be alone with God, and pray to their Father who is in secret, and draw wisdom and refreshment from invisible fountains.

Behold now the period and the preacher—Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, Caiaphas—what wicked men and rulers! What dark and degenerate days! The prospects of the church of God seemed almost hopeless. But after the gloomiest hour comes often the brightest light.

"The word of the Lord came unto John in the wilderness." His was not a mere inward impulse, but a divine call to preach. He came forth from his seclusion "into all the country about the Jordan—the great itinerant. He preached 'the baptism of repentance,' i. e., a token, a profession of repentance, presupposing, or at least obligating to repentance, and not as if the rite of baptism were anything apart from its significance, and 'for the remission of sins,' or with a view to the forgiveness of the penitent, not, indeed, as though the baptism or the repentance of itself secured the remission, but because they prepared the way for it. His message was 'repent and be baptized, that you may be forgiven.' Listen to that 'voice of one crying,' whose echoes can never cease to be heard until the prophecies of redemption are fulfilled, and 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' It is the voice of the Law ushering in the Gospel, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.' It requires the straightening of all that is crooked, the abatement of all that is high, the elevation of all that is low, the smoothing of all that is rough. Such is the preparation that must precede every great revival of religion, or the blessed entrance of Christ into human hearts and homes. If it costs time and labour to level mountains and fill up valleys, how much more to subdue the impotence and unbelief of men!

Mark his boldness and severity. "Brood of vipers!" "Wraith to come!" Why deal so harshly with the crowds attracted to the banks of the Jordan? Hadn't he better beware of giving offense? Look out lest he be thought uncharitable, and lose his popularity? Dwell rather on the love of the coming Christ, and his rich, free grace? Ah! but he saw through the rottenness and hypocrisy of their professions. How else could he rouse them to repentance? He could speak only as the meek and loving Saviour did to the Scribes and Pharisees. Those who object to such preaching mistake the nature of love, which must always be severe, even when deepest and tenderest towards those who need to be denounced and threatened in order to be awakened and saved. They, also, mistake what is requisite to success in saving sinners. Shall they be soothed and flattered by a good-humoured, smooth-tongued condescension? No! Startled into a sense of their guilt, horror-struck as they can be only by hell-fire! They may be fascinated even by a ministry of terror. But, worst of all, those revolted by such words mistake the real truth. The "wraith to come" is not a mere figure of fancy or superstition. The new dispensation is a revelation of wrath as well as mercy, and of nothing but wrath for those who continue unrepentant, though they be baptized and make religious professions. So the Baptist believed. Intense were his convictions, and therefore terrible his warnings.

See how he proceeds, insisting on a genuine repentance. "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance." Robertson observes, "Repent, with him, did not mean 'come with me into the wilderness, to live away from the world,' but it meant this, 'Go back to the world and live above it.' Nay, more. It meant 'Baptism will not save you, nor even a repentance that does not produce the proper fruits of piety. Each one must show that he repents by good acts and holy habits.'"

How keen, too, is John's insight into human nature. Knowing that the Jews boasted of their descent from Abraham, and that multitudes would take refuge from the sharp arrows of the preaching of repentance in the lies that they are somehow allied with

God's people, he adds, "and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father." As if he would declare "Remember that saving religion is a personal thing. No child is saved by his parentage. No member of any church by his church membership. No sinner by affiliation with apostles, bishops, saints, or shelter under such names as Luther, Calvin, Wesley. You must repent and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Nor suppose that God will be without a people if he cuts you off. He is not confined to any special people under the Gospel. He can raise up a family for himself out of the very stones."

How thoroughly radical, too, is this great reformer. Dilating on the certainty of the coming wrath, he avers, "Now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; not laid down by the root, as if not used, but against the tree at the root. The important and unfaithful are about to be cut up, root and branch. The Gospel goes down into the very root of things, and cuts up all evil by the roots. He was not afraid of any radicalism in morals or religion—only let radicalists strike not at imperfect good, but at unqualified evil. Let them lift up their voices against sin."

Besides, how wisely and yet rigorously John meets every man's conscience, not content with general directions, but insisting that each one in repenting should break off, or turn from, the particular sins to which he is tempted. They ask, "What shall we do, then?" His answer is, to the selfish and avaricious, "Do not hoard up your wealth. Share your food and clothing, and other property with the destitute. Penitence is benevolence." To the covetous and unscrupulous tax-gatherers, "Be strictly honest, and no more lacking in integrity." To the soldiers, "Not cease to be soldiers, throw away your arms, or desert your colours, and enter some other calling. But do no violence; away with the insolence common in a conquered province. Be not false accusers, or spies and informers. Take only what is due instead of unlawfully attempting to increase your resources." In other words, "Let soldiers repent of soldiers' sins, and publicans of publicans' sins,—each of the sins of his own class and life." Let ministers repent of ministers' sins, and deacons of deacons' sins, and farmers of farmers' sins,—each looking to himself and his calling to see what his sins are, and what the necessary fruits of repentance. There is sound, common sense in such direct personal and practical appeals. No learned subtleties, no dramatic lullabies, no empty formalities, but the solemn voice of duty echoing through the world's great wilderness.

Greatest of the prophets, because pre-eminently a forerunner and herald of the Lord; marvelously successful, too, in drawing the multitudes, and turning men to truth and righteousness! Most of the first followers of Christ were awakened and converted by his ministry. Many of the Jews took him for the Messiah. But wiffling men "mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ." He kept himself in the background. He pointed to the "Lamb of God" as one whose shoe latchet he was "not worthy to unloose." His motto was, "He must increase"—I decrease.

His popularity was not more evident than his lowliness. His sanctity appeared in the beauty with which he exemplified his own humbling doctrines until he fell a sudden martyr to his faithfulness.

The Danger of Delay.

An examination of statistics of the conversion of souls to God can not fail to impress the mind with the startling fact that millions of human beings are eternally ruined by procrastinating the day of salvation.

The prospect of change for the better diminishes as age advances. This fact is illustrated by a table prepared with much care by the late Dr. Spencer, of the United States. Of a thousand persons hopefully converted there were:—

- Under 20 years of age—549.
Between 20 and 30—337.
Between 30 and 40—86.
Between 40 and 50—15.
Between 50 and 60—3.
Between 60 and 70—1.

But one of a thousand brought home to Christ over sixty years of age.

What a startling lesson to contemplate. Will our readers ponder it in the prospect of the future? Have you, dear reader, lived twenty years without having yielded up your heart to the claims of eternal truth? Then remember that the probability of your conversion to God is not half as great as it was at one time of your life. Are you thirty years old and still living in sin? The hope of your redemption has diminished fully three-fourths. If forty years have passed over you and you are yet without hope, then there are thirty probabilities out of a thousand that you will ever embrace the truth. And, so as you proceed, the chances of your escape from the wrath which is to come grow rapidly less until the last ray of hope is extinguished in the darkness of eternal despair. "The sinner dying a hundred years old shall be accursed."

In view of these impressive facts will you not, unconverted friend, take timely warning, and delay the salvation of your precious soul no longer? It may be that in your case the day is far spent, the night hastens on, the Judge standeth at the door, and what is to be done must be done quickly. "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation."—Christian Standard.

The Philadelphia Presbyterian says:—A missionary physician is wanted in Lang Chow China, as will be seen from the following extract of a letter from the Rev. Charles H. Mills, one of our missionaries:—"I do hope we may find a good, godly man to succeed him (Dr. Bliss). I am sure there must be able, learned, pious young physicians in the Presbyterian Church, who could and would gladly spend their lives in work for Christ here, but it does seem very hard to find such. Philadelphia is a great rendezvous for doctors. Dr. Ellinwood will be able to give applicants all needed information. There is a noble field for a truly consecrated Christian worker."

The Worship of the Holy Spirit.

In pulpit or parlor, in prayer-meeting and private conversation, the mistake is often fallen into of speaking of the Holy Spirit as "it." The writer listened to a most instructive sermon, not long since, on the witness of the Spirit, but it was sadly marred by the repeated occurrence of such phrases, as "when it comes," "we need it," "pray for it"—the "it" referring to God the Holy Ghost. Such mistakes, however inadvertently committed, savor of want of reverence, hide most important truth as to the personal presence and agency of the Holy Spirit, and very easily lead to error. Who would debase God the Father, or God the Son in such manner? We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, the Author of sanctification and hope, the Lightener and Guide of the Church, that this is emphatically the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, that to Him is committed the conduct of the Church till Christ's second coming, and must think and speak of Him with due reverence and love. It is true that in the New Testament we find a neuter pronoun "itself" used twice in this connection, (Rom. vi. 16, 26,) where our translators followed not the theology of Scripture, but a usage of the Greek language, not here requiring explanation, and which, if creating no confusion to the Greeks, certainly does if transferred untranslated into our English tongue. In John xvi. 13, our Lord says, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

We would give prominence to the doctrines concerning the Holy Spirit, for there is no life nor light in the sinner's soul till He creates it, and the believer is sanctified, just so far as he is under His power. A prayer is only so many words, unless He "maketh intercession." The sermon is powerful, when He brings it home in demonstration. The "redemption purchased by Christ" is available when He "applies" it and thus, in some form or application, is the theme of every gospel sermon. Christian creeds and confessions, state or elaborate, first, the doctrines concerning the Father, second, those concerning the Son; third, those concerning the Holy Spirit. And thus quite properly. But practically our knowledge of God—shall we say, our acquaintance with God?—comes to us in the opposite order. It is by the Spirit we come through the Son to the Father. Eph. i. 18.

It will be consistent for those denying the personality of the Spirit to say "it" for they would speak thus of gravitation, or of the spirit of poetry, or the spirit of age. But we believe in things that accompany salvation, and sing—

Come, Holy Spirit, come
Let thy bright beams arise
Dispel the darkness from our minds
And open Thou our eyes
Thine to cleanse the heart
To sanctify the soul
To pour fresh life on every part
And now create the whole

Religious Thought in England.

"The Ritualist cannot connect himself with any party in the Church of England since the Reformation. Like his favorite prototype, Melchizedek, he is without father, or mother. His nearest relations are Queen Mary's bishops, who gave up the Reformation as soon as they saw to what it was tending, and probably before that they were not very zealous for its progress. The Churchmen of the time of James I. and Charles I., even those who were the greatest innovators, never approached anything like a doctrinal agreement with the Church of Rome. Bishop Andrews notwithstanding many conceits—perhaps I ought to say along with many other conceits—maintained that the Pope was Antichrist. Among all kinds of High Churchmen I do not read of one who thought that the Church of England had not adopted the doctrines of Protestantism as opposed to the Church of Rome. Jeremy Taylor, who however, belongs more to the Broad Church than to the High, maintained that toleration could not be yielded to Roman Catholics, because their worship was idolatry. Writing on the Eucharist, he denies every conception of a presence of Christ except as the presence of a spirit. Bishop Cosin, who is generally taken for one of Land's strictest disciples, wrote a history of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and declared his judgment that between the 'real' but 'spiritual' presence in the Church of England and that of the Church of Rome there is a great gulf fixed. Bishop Hicke, one of their most eminent writers, speaking of the Mass, says that, 'The worship of a leek, or an onion, or a head of garlic, is not more against common sense than the worship-ping of a water, the work of a baker or confectioner's shop.' Charles Leslie, and many other Non-jurors, write with equal decision showing a clear antagonism to the doctrines of the Church of Rome."—Contemporary Review.

It is related that a worthy Scotch minister in the last generation delivered a charge to some newly-ordained elders after the following fashion—"Me brethren, rule weel, rule weel, but rule aae that nae a mon or bairn i' the kirk will know that they are ruled. Me brethren, pray God to gie ye common sense. It is ay a chief grace o' an elder."

An old clergyman, who had got a strong lunged helper, observed that one of his hearers was becoming rather irregular in his attendance at church. Of course the divine felt it his duty to visit the backslider, and he accordingly went to his house, but the goodman was not in. He inquired of the wife why John was seldom at church now. "Oh indeed, minister," she replied, "without the slightest hesitation, 'that young man ye've gotten roars so loud that John canna sleep rae comfortable as he did when ye used to preach yerse!' see possibly."

Bible Synonyms.

"Our first duty is to be a Christian at heart. Our next duty is to be a Christian in deed. Every Christian who will listen to me, my exhortation is—never join a sect; never have anything to do with a religious faction, or lift the petty banner of a party. Our leader is not this or that divine or reformer, but the Lord that bought us. Our Church is no other than the Church of God which was born of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Be in fellowship with some particular Church, and let it be the one that is in your judgment, the most scripturally constituted and administered, but ever remember that this Church you are in fellowship with the whole Church in the whole world. Dwell in the best chamber of the house that is accessible to you; but never suppose that your chamber is the whole house, or any particular Church the Church universal. Bear a brotherly heart and countenance to all who love the Lord, that, so far as your influence extends, there may be no selfishness in the body. If there be splits or divisions, regard these with distaste, as in themselves evil; yet remember that they evolve a certain amount of good, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you. Whatever firm, the confusion in the visible Church, so pray and so live as to be approved of Him who knows the heart, and to be made manifest in the sight of men as no heretics, but faithful members of Christ, and loving children of God."—Sunday Magazine.

Prayer and Power.

Elliot used to say that "prayer and pains can accomplish anything," and Judson, the great missionary saint, "I never sincerely and earnestly prayed for anything but it at sometime, in some shape, probably the last I should have expected, it came."

These plain testimonies are full of encouragement for the humblest and weakest. To the latter is, indeed, the greatest encouragement, as "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

There is no scientific objection against prayer which can have much force in the presence of real faith. The only forcible argument against prayer is unbelief; the best argument for it is faith, and the result of faith, the prayer and the answer.

"Man can alter, within certain limits, the elements and courses of nature," says Tyndall. Cannot God do as much? Man makes changes by the exercise of his personal will. Cannot God do as much? The earthly parent, in the exercise of personal will, grants the request of the child. Is not God just as good? Is not He too, a father? and has he not said: "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find?"—Wayside.

Archbishop Whately's Providence.

Readers of Archbishop Whately's writings will remember his decisive condemnation of the habit of ascribing to Providence only those exceptional events which strike us as wonderful making "providential" nearly equivalent to miraculous. Among several anecdotes of the Archbishop contributed to Lippincott's Magazine by T. Adolphus Trollope, is one touching this point. A packet-ship sailing from New York to Liverpool was burned. Among those who escaped in a boat was a clergyman who made himself the hero of religious circles in Dublin, dilating on the wonderful mercy he had experienced.

"One day, on the occasion of one of the general receptions of the clergy, which often took place at the archiepiscopal residence, our hero was holding forth in his usual strain to a little knot gathered around him in Whately's drawing-room, when the Archbishop, whose wont it was on such occasions to stroll about the room from one group to another, saying a few words here and a few words there to his guests, came up to the knot of which Mr. Thompson (we will give him that name for the nonce) was the centre. Whately listened with grave attention to the telling of his story and to the usual comments on it, and then spoke. "Wonderful occurrence! A great and significant mercy, indeed, Mr. Thompson. But I think I can cap it," said he, using an expression which was very common with him, tossing up his whitehead in the old bull-like manner—"I think I can cap it with an incident from my own experience."

Everybody pricked up his ears and listened eagerly for the passage in the Archbishop's life which should show a yet more marvellously merciful escape than that of Mr. Thompson from the burning ship.

Whately continued in the most impressive manner. "Not three months ago I sailed in the packet from Holyhead to Kingston (the port for Dublin), and—"

A pause, while the Archbishop took a copious pinch of snuff, and his hearers were on the tenterhooks of expectation.

"—And by God's mercy the vessel never caught fire at all. Think of that, Mr. Thompson!"

The eloquence of the pulpit should be pre-eminently the eloquence of elevated thought, uttered through that various structure of discourse and style of expression in which a versatile mind will convey such thought. It should be the eloquence of real life, and of great occasion. It should be the eloquence of many purposes in great exigencies. In its best forms it will resemble, and yet surpass the best eloquence of senates in the emergencies of nations.—Phelps.

Moses saw the Shechinah, and it rendered his face resplendent, so that he covered it with a veil, the Jews not being able to bear the reflected light; we behold Christ as in the glass of His word, and (as the reflection of a very luminous object from a mirror glides the face on which the reflected rays fall) our faces shine too; and we veil them not, but diffuse the light, which, as we discover more and more of His glory in the Gospel, is continually increasing.—Deedridge.