

ONLY A YEAR.

Only a year ago—a ringing voice, a clear blue eye,
And clustering curls of sunny hair, too fair to die.

Only a year,—no voice, no smile, no glance of eye,
No clustering curls of golden hair, fair, but to die.

One year ago,—what loves, what schemes far into life,
What joyous hopes, what high resolves, what generous strife.

The silent picture on the wall, the burial stone,
Of all that beauty, life, and joy remain alone!

One year, one little year, and so much gone!
And yet the even flow of life moves calmly on.

The grave grows green, the flowers bloom fair above that head,
No sorrowing tint of leaf or spray says she is dead.

No pause or hush of merry birds that sing above,
Tells us how coldly sleeps below the form we love.

Where hast thou been this year beloved? What hast thou seen?
What visions fair, what glorious life, where hast thou been?

The veil! the veil! so thin, so strong! 'twixt us and thee,
The mystic veil! when shall it fall, that we may see?

Not dead, not sleeping, not even gone, but present still,
And waiting for the coming hour of God's sweet will.

Lord of the living and the dead, our Saviour dear!
We lay in silence at Thy feet this sad, sad year!

—Mrs. H. B. Stowe.

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT GO TO CHURCH?—II.

A Discourse by the Rev. A. J. Bray at Zion Church, Montreal, October 27, 1878.

I was unable, through lack of time last Sunday, to say all that was in my mind on the subject of not going to church. I spoke, you will remember, first of the very poor, stating the reason, and what I conceived to be the remedy. Then I went on to speak of those who dine late, most, of the young men who are cultivating a club-life. I uttered a warning against that which I hope will be altogether unheeded. But it will be obvious that very much more remains to be said on the subject, for the list is not exhausted.

I would mention first of all to-night those who are kept away from the church by the dulness of the church itself. That is a wrong for which we are mainly responsible. That the exercises of the sanctuary are as a rule dry and uninteresting we must allow. Dry and uninteresting, that is, for those who come merely to be entertained. Every Sunday custom tells the bell of time, and those who respond to it may be divided into two classes. Some will go with an earnest thought in the mind, and an eager reverent sentiment warming in the heart. As they seat themselves in the pew holiest associations of time and place will crowd upon the memory to calm and pacify the spirit which through all the week has been careful and troubled about many things. They prepare themselves for the teacher's speech to their deepest and their highest powers. The Old Testament with its sermons, and prophetic visions, and chapters of history and noble swelling psalms, they dearly love; but they love the New Testament with its crowds of Apostles and Martyrs, in the midst of them all standing the Hebrew peasant through whose face shines the soul of Deity, and from which the beams of Infinite truth flash abroad, with expressions of love, wide over the world. They are not so much conscious of an intellectual effort reaching up through Jesus Christ to God, the Absolute Truth—as that they are witnessing an unsealing of the treasures of the skies, an overflow into time of the light and grace which in the ages to come shall heal and make heavenly all the earth. The hymns they sing are old, and rich with holy memories, like the "Home, sweet home," or the "Auld lang syne" that takes us back to the busy towns or flowering fields of England, or to the gleaming lochs and heath-clad hills of Scotland. As I have sometimes read that grand old hymn "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," or that other which seems like the sob of a child in the dark, "Jesus, lover of my soul," I have seen wrinkles disappear from some faces, and a dreamy look come into the eyes, and I knew that they had travelled away from the present with its hot cruel passions and sins, back to youth, or childhood: the pious breath of father, mother, sister, or one more tenderly beloved, was beating on them once again; and the tune came like a soft wind of summer which hangs over a pond full of lilies, and then wafts the fragrance abroad. And they have not found the place and the service dull and dry. With lofty purpose they have come to be lifted by hymn and prayer and sermon towards the measure of a perfect man. But take those others—of whom I spoke a week or two ago—who go to church from no love for it—from no desire, or thought that good is in it, but simply in obedience to the conventional, simply led by a dull habit. And it is dulness meeting and mixing with the dulness. A place ill lighted and ill ventilated—the old dreary hymns to old dreary music—the same prayers, read from a book in a mechanical way with no heart in the voice—a dry homily on some time-worn doctrine—arguments to prove what no one in the congregation ever doubted—premises that never lead to conclusions, and effects for which no cause can be found. We know that Religion is of supreme importance to us all, and that we ought to attend to its concern with careful thought, and constant energy. We know it, and we do not know it. Not many of us believe it so as to make our faith a fact of life and conduct. We hold it for times and set occasions, that is all.

And that being so, no wonder that the church is a dull place; for it is devoted to the things which are highest, and should be first, but which in fact are lowest and last. We preach God! How many of an ordinary congregation will try to grasp the idea? how many will soar aloft on the wings of imagination or strong reasoning? We preach that sin must be punished! How many believe what we say, and seek to avoid the penalty by avoiding the evil? By long established custom and common consent we do not apply the Christian religion to politics, to business, to society, to the life of the family, or the individual—and so of necessity our preaching is in a groove, and our service is dull. And people are repelled by it. They want something for the imagination—something for the reason—something to stir in the intellect and the heart. We tell people that the chief business of life is to save the soul, and that Christ came to enable them to do that—never mind the intellect, never mind the imagination—never mind the judgment—think of the soul, and by the grace of God save that. And they say: The soul—what is it? If it is not memory, nor fancy, nor intellect, nor sentiment, what can it be? Instead of answering these questions, and raising many more; instead of addressing ourselves to the matters which press upon their attention every day, we go on expounding doctrines, and beating out theories for the future life. That for the uninterested is dulness. To those who love them—have an appetite for them—they will be meat and drink; but, just as music only appeals to the musical, and science to the scientific, and art to the lovers of it, so our services only appeal to those of ecclesiastical education and taste. And only a portion of the people have that taste, and another portion who have it not turn from us, finding no interest, no entertainment, no arresting and detaining force for the mind in the dull clatter of our ecclesiastical machinery.

To state the evil is to suggest the remedy. I am profoundly convinced that we may make our service more, interesting by making them more real; by putting ourselves more constantly *en rapport* with the audience. With the words of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Isaiah before us, we should know how to be political; we should apply the morality of Christ to the ordinary dealings of men; we should repeat—if nothing better comes to our lips—the earnest words of the Bible which burn even now when two or three thousand years old. Great efforts are made in the way of ritual, in some quarters; but I am satisfied that efforts in the way of plain, honest, manful speaking would bring about more lasting results. What we want is not a ministry that goes visiting and gossiping all the week, and must perforce be dull, because weary on the Sunday; but a man coming forward, himself living, and a living religion in him: a man having the feelings, the ideas, and the actions of one who has a strong faith, and a great life in Christ. We want a ministry that is not afraid to face any questions of the day—able to recognise a new form of truth, and the constant inventions of love—able to gather into one the broken and scattered rays, that men may walk in the light of God.

But we have not attempted that in a general way yet; we have held on to the old forms even when they were worn out, and to the old creeds even when they had ceased to express our faith. And that leads me to speak of another class of non-church-goers—those who are repelled by the bigotry of the Church. By bigotry, I mean an obstinate or blind attachment to a particular creed. I find in the history of dogmas an unwillingness to admit of the need for change, for expansion and progress. On the contrary, there has been a very manifest disposition to draw in the lines and narrow the circles of thought. It would be difficult to say what was the precise creed of the Apostle Paul—all Christendom is divided on the subject—but every effort the Church has made since then to define her theology has been in the direction of narrowness and hardness. You know how dogmas grew and multiplied in the Roman Catholic Church. The dogma of eternal hell, of purgatory, of transubstantiation, of prayers for the dead, of prayers to Saints, of the worship of the Virgin, of the Immaculate Conception were formulated one after another, and each was but another effort to define and bind the eternal truth of God. Take Calvinism again; that is a grand attempt to build religion up in a legal and logical form. It is true that the truth has always been greater than man's word about it—has refused to be confined within a wall of circumscription—has refused to run in a channel as a river—would not be kept within prescribed bounds as the ocean by its rocky shore; it has had times of spring tide, and the waters would rise and flood the shores and stretch inland for many a league, washing away, and causing to disappear many a grey landmark. But the Church has opposed it always, and stood in the way to keep back the ocean. And when the breath of the Lord has passed over it and caused it to heave and swell, like the ocean when pressed by the wings of a storm, the Church has cried out heresy, and reared her gibbet and kindled her fires. It is a truth—a sad, a heart-breaking truth—that the culture of the day, the intelligence of the day, the strong manhood of the day, are breaking away from the Church. The Church is regarded as the determined foe of science, and of philosophy. Free thought is just a synonym for infidelity. The Church is just a synonym for intellectual limitation and narrowness. And while that is so, it must be that the Church will repel very many of the sober and the thoughtful among men. Young trees of the forest will not bear to have iron bands welded around them—they want only the bark which is elastic and will expand with the growth of the trunk, letting the sap run up freely from the roots to the branches. Orion is belted and fixed in its orbit, and the sweet influences of Pleiades are bound, but the truth is not a star, nor a world of suns; it is light, having no limits of time and space, but is all pervading; like God Himself, it besets every man behind and before. When we have recognised that we shall draw the men to the mind and heart of the Church who now are repelled and shut out.

And under this head let me speak of the bigotry of the Church in matters of recreation, or amusement. I am not at all for levelling all barriers and banishing all distinctions between the world and the Church, so that the one cannot be distinguished from the other; but I do hold that the Church has been too austere, too hard, and cold, and inhuman in this matter. We have too often, and too much, put forward Christianity as neither human nor reasonable, and those are the only conditions on which it can be made a working power in the world. We are living in the world, and have got to live in it, and build up our manhood in it, and although I would be the last to recommend that Christianity should take for its standard the standard of the world, still the Church must