

THE PROVIDENCES OF THE YEAR.

The Providences of the year. The things that happen—how are they to be regarded? The question is too deep for us to be able to give a completely satisfactory answer. One could not venture to say everything that has happened, either in the life of a nation, or the life of a person, during the past year, was directly arranged beforehand, though doubtless many things may be directly arranged by God. In some cases, God may allow the natural laws he has made to work out their natural result, as a lesson and warning. Sometimes it looks as if He lets men run the length of their tether, as Napoleon, for instance; but only to the length of their tether, after all. "Thus far and no farther." God's ways of Providential working, in these respects, we cannot fathom. They are beyond the reach of mortal eye or human intelligence. But one thing, at least, seems very plain—God evidently does overrule happenings in the national, and also in the individual life, in such a way as to bring good out of apparent evil.

We have spoken of national happenings. In the war between Japan and Russia, we all sympathize to a great extent with plucky little Japan, whose remarkable resistance to the huge country of Russia has caused astonishment and admiration. Japan is spoken of commonly as a heathen country, yet it has manifested more respect for true progress and for the constitutional rights of the people than the so-called Christian country of Russia. It has been a dreadful war, and it wrings our hearts to think of the widows and orphans, the maimed and wounded soldiers, on both sides. Now coming back to the application of the doctrine of Providence, can we say that God directly ordained and ordered to come to pass all this suffering? Here we arrive at a place where we, finite creatures, cannot speak with assurance of the plans of the infinite God, with whom one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

But it does look as if, in the matter of overruling for good, some great designs of Providence are visibly unfolding themselves, so far as the war between Japan and Russia is concerned, before our very eyes. Take first the case of Japan. By the alliance with Great Britain, the great Christian nation, Japan is becoming more friendly to the teachings of the Christian countries, so that the cities, and ports, and country places of Japan, are being thrown open freely to the English language, English ideas and English missionaries. Then it is very evident that the admiration for Japan entertained by China is giving Japan a great influence and leadership in China. It looks as if Japan would be widely Christianized, and then that Japan would be the Providential instrument for the widespread Christianization of China. And all this growing, to a great extent, out of the war between Japan and Russia, thus showing how

God brings good out of evil in his overruling Providence.

Now take Russia, with a bad tyrannical government, but on the whole a loveable and simple-hearted, common people. These people of Russia are a thousand years behind the free Canadian people in political, civil and religious liberty. In Russia, the Greek Church is a despotism taking the children from the control of their parents. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to hold public meetings, the right to be fairly tried on accusation—all these things which we prize so highly in Canada, are things unknown in Russia. But these things are beginning to be talked about, even in Russia, and are bound to come, even though somewhat slowly; and one influence that is helping to bring them is the war between Russia and Japan. Russia needs the help of her people; but the people are discontented because they are denied the rights and privileges of self-government; so that the Russian rulers will be compelled by the war to try and please the people by granting them some liberty; and liberty as we know, is a leaven that spreads and spreads like the leaven that the woman hid in the meal.

The same principle of providential overruling is observed in our individual lives. Many things happen to us which we cannot understand; then we fume, and fret, and say, "all these things are against us"; but they may not be against us at all. They may seem to be so, at first; they may be intended for our discipline; but afterwards, like the carrying of Joseph into Egypt, these happenings are only the means of blessings.

Speaking again, for the moment, of war, it is another suggestive indication of the overruling Providence of God, that a great blow to war in general, is likely to be given by the specific war between Japan and Russia. All the great nations of the earth are now signing arbitration treaties with each other, agreeing to settle their differences without war; and this readiness to agree to settle disputes has no doubt been providentially quickened by the horror caused by the war between Russia and Japan.

A word in conclusion. Another year, with what we call its uncertainties, has been ushered in. There is no uncertainty with God. God in Providence is constantly overruling all sorts of happenings for the spiritual and final good of those who love Him and endeavor to serve Him. Whatever may happen, let us keep up our courage, and our confidence in God's overruling Providence. God is greater and stronger than anyone or anything that can be against us. Let us put our whole trust in His wisdom, His power, and His overruling mercy, and thus make 1905 a year always of hope and happiness.

It is announced that the Dominion government has given contracts for two more Marconi stations, one to be at White Roche, Labrador, and the other at Point Rich, Newfoundland.

SPECIAL SERVICES IN ENGLAND.

The British Weekly has asked many ministers in Birmingham and Bristol, England, where the remarkable Torrey-Alexander services were held, for a candid expression of opinion as to results accomplished. Letters from twenty or thirty prominent pastors are published, and it is plain to see that the "personal equation" has something to do with the views expressed. Here and there a pastor writes that he has received no uplift and no accessions, while another in the same neighborhood finds his prayer meetings doubled, his missionary activities quickened and his church roll greatly lengthened. The increase there as here, and as truly now as in the past, depends quite as much upon the soil as upon the seed or the sower. One minister reports that fully one-third of the four thousand converts in Bristol were identified with the English Church. Those who report the largest accessions find them gathered from their own Sunday schools and Christian Endeavor Societies, but confess that the ordinary means of the church had not brought these parties to a decision. One minister, in hearty sympathy with the evangelists, criticises freely but kindly the "midnight missions" and "children's services," in each of which it was only too evident the hearers were not capable of rational decision, the children on account of immaturity and the night tramps on account of intoxication.

A careful survey of all the replies brings to mind the saying of the Saviour that the kingdom of heaven is as the drawing of a net which encloses fish of all kinds, some to be gathered up and saved, and some to be again sorrowfully committed to the sea. The evangelists have now begun a three months' campaign in Liverpool, where a tabernacle accommodating 7,000 was erected especially for their meetings. The same almost overwhelming popular interest which has greeted Dr. Torrey and Mr. Alexander in other cities of the British Isles, was evidenced in the initial services at Liverpool.

The writer once had a friend who literally kept a daily account with the Lord. On one side of the ledger he credited himself with whatever he did for the Lord; the money he gave to religious or benevolent causes, the kind actions which he performed, the various efforts which he put forth at soul-saving and such like. On the other side he put down whatever the Lord did for him. If a friend cheered him on his way; if health was restored after sickness; if some unexpected pleasure came to him; if he was prospered in his worldly affairs, it was all credited to the Lord, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. After a few weeks of this bookkeeping he gave it up. "It's no use," he said one day, "I can never get a balance. I am simply getting hopelessly into debt. The Lord's side of the account is assuming alarming proportions, and my side is so poor and insignificant in comparison that I have resolved to give up keeping the account and simply acknowledge myself a hopeless bankrupt."