

## Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

### LEAVE ME NOT.

BY BEDE, BRLEVILLE.

O Lord, I am troubled and sorry, and greatly bowed down for my sin,  
Thick darkness gathereth round me, the sorrows of death are within;  
I see not Thy face in the shadow, I feel not Thy helpful hand,  
But leave me not I beseech Thee, alone in this desert land.

Alone where the treacherous pitfall is hidden each side of the path,  
Where often choicest appearances are fore-ordained vessels of wrath,  
While Time in impetuous current upspeeds through the Golden Gates,—  
O leave me not, I beseech Thee, alone in such awful straits.

My flesh and my heart are fast failing, though spirit would willingly bear;  
Familiar friends have all left me, not one for my soul now doth care;  
O God of the desolate hear me as out of the depths I cry,  
And leave me not, I beseech Thee, alone or I surely die.

My sins and mistakes so grievous, I've told unto Thee one by one,  
And sore repented while coming as Thou hast desired me to come;  
I'm kneeling still waiting the answer though only one word or touch,  
So tired, sin-laden, world-weary, Thou never hadst "nay" for such.

Right into the deepening soul-gloom His written word flasheth like light:  
"I know thy sorrows, thou lone one, I've sworn by the throne of My might  
(The word of thy God will not fail thee, though heaven and earth pass away)  
To leave thee not till all shadows are lost in an endless day."

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

### THE FESTIVAL OF THE SOUL

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D.

The life of the Christian does not always run evenly. It is varied in its experiences. Sometimes it sinks into dark depths where it is oppressed by doubts or despondency, or troubled by problems that are hard to solve. Sometimes it sweeps into the arena of conflict where it wrestles valiantly with the temptations that spring up through the world, the flesh and the devil, and by faith enlisting a Higher One on its side, it gets the victory; sometimes it soars like a lark into the sweet, light-filled air to sing its grateful song to Him who is revealed most gloriously to the soul. These are all incidents in the life of the Christian. They do not recur at regular intervals as the ocean tides do. It is not always in the dark, nor is it always in the light, though conflict is to a large extent continuous. The seasons of high festival may come seldom, but they do come sometimes, to enlarge the nature and uplift the whole being Godward and make it more hallowed and helpful manward. These seasons do not come to all, nor do they come to those who are unprepared; nor to those who have no hungry longing that they would come. They are seasons that crown faith and prayer and lives of righteousness. They often follow periods of fasting from self and selfishness. They are accompanied by, or are the outcome of, meditation on the Word of God. He who watches at the posts of wisdom's door will have the joy of seeing the door open and the Glory of God appear. To the longing soul Christ comes. He satisfies the longing soul, while the rich he sends empty away. He that asks receives, he that seeks finds, to him that knocks the door of divine discovery is opened. How many encouraging instances we have of this, well calculated to stir us up to seek the same for ourselves. The celebrated Welsh preacher, Christmas Evans, has put his experience on record in these words: "On a day ever to be remembered by me, as I was going from Dolgelley to Machynlleth, and climbing up towards Cadair Idris, I considered it to be incumbent on me to pray, however hard I felt my heart, and however worldly the frame of my spirit was. Having begun in the name of Jesus, I soon felt as it were the fetters loosening, and the old hardness of heart softening, and, as I thought, mountains of frost and snow dissolving and melting within me. This engendered confidence in my soul in the promise of the Holy Ghost. I felt my whole mind relieved from some great bondage; tears flowed copiously, and I was constrained to cry out for the gracious visits of God, by restoring to my soul the joy of his salvation; and that he would visit the churches in Anglesea that were under my care. I embraced in my supplications all the churches of the saints, and nearly all the ministers in the principality by their names. This struggle lasted for three hours; it rose again and again, like one wave after another, or a flowing high tide, driven by a strong wind, until my nature became faint by weeping and crying. Thus I resigned myself to Christ, body and soul, gifts and labours—all my life—every day and every hour that remained for me; and all my cares I committed to Christ. The road was mountainous and lonely, and I was wholly alone, and suffered no interruption in my wrestlings with God."

It is always warm spring time when God comes near. Dr. James Hamilton, of London, Eng., speaking of the devoted missionary, David Sandeman, tells us that he "was naturally of a sombre temperament; but when it pleased God to reveal to him the Saviour, it was a total transformation. It almost lifted him off the earth, and made him hold so lightly house and lands and even dear kindred, that he was saved, what is to some of us a sore distraction, a divided heart. The night when he was dying of cholera at Anoy, a friend asked him, "Have you any pain?" and he answered, "The

only pain I have known since I knew Jesus Christ is sin." "Have you any message to your friends?" "Tell them that it was only last night that the love of Jesus came rushing into my soul like the waves of the sea; so that I had to cry 'Stop, Lord, it is enough.'" Oh the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Jesus! and I was constrained to cry out,

"All too long have we been parted;  
Let my spirit speed to His."

Is it not wonderful that a man dying of cholera should forget his agony, or have it swallowed up in the joy and love of Jesus. And these so overflowing as that he must cry "Stop, Lord, it is enough." O, those Tabor heights of blessing! how bright with manifested glory they shine! They discover to us the possible in the higher ranges of Christian enjoyment. Mr. Sandeman's experience reminds us of that John Welsh, known in all the churches as a man of prayer. During his last sickness, he was so filled and overcome with the sensible enjoyment of God, that he was overheard to utter these words: "O Lord, hold Thy hand, it is enough; Thy servant is a clay vessel, and can hold no more." What a festival of the soul is that? It is related of Robert Bruce, another Scots worthy, that "some time before his death, being at Edinburgh, where, through weakness, he often kept his chamber, a meeting of godly ministers having been held anent some matter of Church government, they, hearing he was in the town, came and gave him an account of the prelates' actings. Mr. Bruce prayed, and in his prayer he repeated over again to the Lord the substance of their discourse, which was a very sad representation of the case of the Church; when there came an extraordinary motion on all present, and such sensible down-pouring of the Spirit that they could hardly contain themselves. Mr. Wemyss, of Lathocker, who was present, said at departing, 'O how strange a man is this, for he knocked down the Spirit of God upon us all!' This he said because Mr. Bruce, in the time of that prayer, divers times, knocked with his fingers on the table."

In the life of Jonathan Edwards, the famous theologian, we have many references to seasons of soul festival. Indeed, his life is peculiar in this, that it gives with more particulars instances of this kind. "I have many times had a sense of the glory of the third person in the Trinity in his office of sanctifier; in his holy operations communicating divine life and light to the soul."

We select these as specimens: "I very frequently used to retire into a solitary place on the banks of the Hudson river, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things, and sweet converse with God, and had many sweet hours there." "Once, as I rode on into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that, for me, was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, pure, sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception—which continued as near as I can judge about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust, to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in Him; to live upon Him; to serve and follow Him; to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity. I have several other times had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects."

Now if there are any lessons taught by these instances, specially adapted for our time, methinks they are these first. We need to be more alone with God if we would enjoy such seasons of high festival. In almost every case there is isolation from the rush and turmoil of busy life. There is a going apart. Dr. Chalmers complained that he was hustled out of his spirituality. And are not we? "The world is too much with us."

Listen to what one of the wisest men of our time says—the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone—"The rapidity of the movement of the time predisposes the mind to novelty. The multiplication of enjoyments, through the progress of commerce and invention, enhances the materialism of life, strengthens by the forces of habit the hold of the seen world upon us, and leaves both less of brain power and of heart power available for the unseen."

Second, We need to cultivate more the spirit of believing prayer. That is the spirit of our sonship. And we cannot do that unless we enter into our closet and shut to the door, and pray to our Father who seeth in secret. We are really what we are in secret, with no eye but God's upon us. Our spiritual life either fails or flourishes there.

Third, We need our minds filled with and exercised upon the divine revelation. We require to meditate in the law of God. And that demands both time and quietness. We may think of the promises and precepts and exhortations and warnings on the street and in the midst of business—but the power of that thinking, and its helpfulness, will come out of our precious meditations and prayers. We must let God's truth take hold upon our souls. We must offer ourselves to it to be charged, charmed, and characterized by it.

Fourth, We must obey the truth. The obedience of faith always calls the soul to a festival of joy and gladness, that girds it with strength and crowns it with favour. "There is no want to them that fear Thee."

### THE IDEA OF THE PRAYER MEETING.

Since the conduct of the prayer meeting generally falls to the lot of the pastor, it is highly important that he entertain right thoughts about what the prayer meeting should be. What, then, is the true idea of the prayer meeting? Is it simply an occasion to the Church for assembling to engage together in prayer? Or is there some element other than the devotional element which ought to predominate in our conception of the prayer meeting, and interpret to us its significance? What aspect of the prayer meeting is the chief one the one entitled to preside over our conception? Is the prayer meeting chiefly a devotional or chiefly a social occasion? Or is it a certain blending of these two things in one? Or is it rather something still different from either of these, or from both of them, however blended?

We answer that the prayer meeting, while, of course, at the same time social and devotional, as its name implies, is, in its true highest idea, something different from that which either or that which both of these two adjectives would describe. The prayer meeting is a meeting of the members of the Church with each other. But it is still more a meeting of all the members with Christ. Christ's presence, His peculiar, His especial presence in the prayer meeting is the thought that should rule our conception of its true nature. This we gather from the nineteenth and twentieth verses of Matt. xviii. These verses read as follows: "Again I say unto you that if two or three of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, here am I in the midst of them." These two verses taken together, with the conjunction "for" standing between them, evidently point to a meeting for prayer as the thought that was in the Saviour's mind. There was to be agreement in prayer, and the persons agreeing were to be gathered together. Jesus assigns, as the sufficient reason why prayer agreed in by persons assembled together should be answered, that He would be present Himself in the midst of the assemblage. It may be said, "But Christ is always, everywhere, with His people, whether they are alone or together." True but He has nowhere else made a special promise of being present among an assembly of His people, and here the promise is to an assembly conceived as engaged in prayer. The prayer meeting has, therefore, a singular, an eminent promise of Christ's own personal presence. This extraordinary grace pronounced upon the prayer meeting is worthy of being regarded as constituting the chief distinguishing feature of the occasion. A striking and beautiful analogy, not to say prefigurement, is furnished in the Old Testament. The "tabernacle of the congregation," so often named in the books of Moses, was more properly the "tabernacle of meeting." And this meeting was not a meeting of the children of Israel with one another, but a meeting of all with God. Exodus xxix. 42, 43, makes this plain: "The door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet the children of Israel." (Compare this passage in the Revised Version.) The prayer meeting is the Christian "tabernacle of the congregation," that is, tabernacle of meeting with Christ. In words parallel to those of God's promise to His ancient people, "There I will meet with the children of Israel," Christ has said with reference to the prayer meeting, "There am I in the midst of them."

The very first and the most constant subsequent aim of the pastor should be to seize and to hold this thought himself, and then, with ever-varied and insistent inculcation, to impart it to his people. It provides at once the most fruitful condition conceivable of a good prayer-meeting, if the occasion is presided over by the vivid thought, in the common consciousness of all, that the Lord Christ Himself is personally present in the midst of the assembly. In the element of this presiding thought, all the exercises of the occasion are to be conceived of as transacted. The leadership is to be administered by the pastor on the principle of his being the voluntary, but obedient, visible and audible organ of the invisible and inaudible, but present and sovereign, Lord Himself. The leadership should, therefore, be as unapparent as possible—the imperceptible condition of the progress and harmony of the meeting. As far as the leadership necessarily asserts or declares or acknowledges itself, it should do so as consciously and confessedly a vicegerency merely, taking the word of command directly from the immediate King. But the ideal leadership leads by following. That is, the pastor so really, so literally, so self-evidencingly waits on Christ for the sign which he then communicates as intermediary to the meeting, that the meeting instinctively learns to look itself for the signs directly to the first source, and thus leader and led together follow Christ. So it is that the ideal leader of the prayer meeting leads by following. The prime condition, the condition that implies, if it does not contain, everything else essential to the prayer meeting, accordingly is, for the pastor himself to possess, or rather to be himself possessed by, the living sense that Christ is the One who makes the occasion a meeting, Christ being the One by eminence whom the company assemble to meet—and then for the pastor to make this living sense equally the overmastering thought of all.

This conception of the prayer meeting, as rather a meeting of the Church with Christ than a meeting of the members with each other, will serve to correct certain mistakes into which those who forget the true characteristic element of the occasion are likely to fall. For instance, the prayer meeting is not primarily a means of impression upon those who do not participate actively in it. It is not even primarily a means of spiritual improvement to those who do participate actively in it. It is primarily an act of common obedience to the summons of Christ to His followers, bidding them assemble for the purpose of meeting Him. The prayer meeting, no doubt, is eminently a means of spiritual impression. It is eminently, too, a means of spiritual improvement. It is both the one and the other of these things. But, secondly, and by consequence rather than primarily, and of chief purpose on our part. If we aim at producing spiritual impression, if we aim at realizing spiritual improvement, we so far miss alike our aim and the prime result of good to us intended. The prayer meeting is an interval of social communion with Christ. Our sole first aim in it should be to obey Christ and do Him homage. The manifold results of good from it at which we sometimes improperly aim, will certainly and abundantly follow—all the more certainly and all the more abundantly, for not being consciously aimed at. Let the prayer meeting be absolutely sincere. Its ostensible purport, self-evidently, is such as we have described it. Let the reality of it actually correspond to its virtual profession of character.