

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

SWEET FRUIT FROM A THORNY TREE.

I, who have of late been a prisoner of the Lord in the sick chamber, would witness my confession as He enables me.

Pain teaches us our nothingness. Health permits us to swell in self-esteem, and gather much which is unreal; sickness makes our feebleness conspicuous, and at the same time breaks up many of our shams. We need solid grace when we are thrown into the furnace of affliction; gilt and tinsel shrivel up in the fire. The patience in which we somewhat prided ourselves, where is it when sharp pangs succeed each other like poisoned arrows setting the blood on flame? The joyful faith which could do all things, and bear all sufferings, is it always at hand when the time of trial has arrived? The peace which stood aloft on the mountain's summit and serenely smiled on storms beneath, does it hold its ground quite so easily as we thought it would, when at our ease we prophesied our behaviour in the day of battle? We are most of us by far too great. A soap-bubble has a scant measure of material in it for its size, and most of us are after the same order: it is greatly for our good to be reduced to our true dimensions. To be nothing, and to feel less than nothing is most sweet, for then we cower down under the great wings of God as the little chick beneath the brooding hen, and in utter helplessness we find our strength and solace. Nothing goes but that which ought to go; the flower falls, but the seed ripens; the froth is blown away, but the wines on the lees are perfected. When naught remains but the clinging of a weeping child who grasps his Father's hand, naught but the smiting on the breast of the publican who cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner," naught but the last resolve, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," no real loss has been sustained, say rather, a great gain has come to the humbled heart.

Heavy sickness and crushing pain shut out from us a thousand minor cares. We cannot now be cumbered with much serving, for others must take our place, and play the Martha in our stead; and it is well if then we are enabled to take Mary's place as nearly as possible and lie at Jesus' feet if we cannot sit there. Thus is the soul shut in with God as within a wall of fire, and all her thought must be of Him, and of His promise and His help; grateful if but such thoughts will come, and forced, if they come not, just to lie as one dead at the feet of the great Lord and look up and hope. It is well to have the windows shut which look towards earth and its cares, that we may be driven to that fairer prospect which lies on the other side of Jordan.

Sickness has caused many workers to become more intense when they have again been favoured to return to their place. The time, apparently wasted, may turn out to be a real economy of life, if the worker for years to come shall be more earnest, more careful, more prayerful, more dependent upon God, more passionately set upon doing his Lord's business thoroughly. They say that pearls are bred in the oyster by disease; may our graces be such pearls. Falling leaves enrich the soil about the forest tree; would God that our weeping autumns would yield us fairer springs and larger growths.

Pain, if sanctified, creates tenderness towards others. Alone it may harden and shut up the man within himself. Grief has been full of the mother of mercy, and the pangs of sickness have been the birth-throes of compassion. If our hearts learn sympathy they have been in a good school, though the master may have used the rod most heavily, and taught us by many a smart. The keys of men's hearts hang up in the narrow chamber of suffering, and he who has not been there can scarcely know the art of opening the recesses of the soul. Happy is the man who has been afflicted if the Holy Spirit shall thereby make him a son of consolation to the mourners in Zion.

Pain has a tendency to make us grateful when health returns. As birds sing most after their winter's silence, when the warm spring has newly returned, so should we be most praiseful when our gloomy hours are changed for cheerful restoration. Blessed be the Lord, who healeth all our diseases. Jehovah Rophi is a name much treasured by those who know the Lord that healeth them. Gratitude is a choice spice for heaven's altar. It burns well in

the censer, and sends up a fragrant cloud, acceptable to the great High Priest. Sickness thus yields large tribute to the King's revenue, and if it be so we may cheerfully endure it. Bow down, frail body and faint heart, if in the morning ye can yield what ye had never produced if ye had stood erect in manly vigour. Bruise, Lord, the spice, which else had kept its sweetness slumbering and useless.

This is not a hymn, but yet it has heaven's poetry within it, even this agonizing cry, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt;" and it is a delicious result of trial if in this hearty utterance we learn to imitate our Lord, and to have fellowship with his sufferings.—C. H. Spurgeon, in *Sword and Trowel*.

THE TWO SUNSETS.

No bird-song floated down the hill,
The tangled bank below was still,

No rustle from the birchen stem,
No ripple from the water's hem.

The dusk of twilight round us grew,
We felt the falling of the dew;

For, from us, ere the day was done,
The wooded hills shut out the sun.

But on the river's farther side,
We saw the hill-tops glorified:

A tender glow, exceeding fair,
A beam of day without its glare.

With us the damp, the chill, the gloom:
With them the sunset's rosy bloom;

While the lake through willowy vistas seen,
The river rolled in shade between

From out the darkness, where we trod,
We gazed upon those hills of God,

Whose light seemed not of moon or sun;
We spake not, but our thought was one.

We paused, as if from that bright shore
Beckoned our lean ones gone before,

And stilled our beating hearts to hear
The voices lost to mortal ear!

Sudden our pathway turned from night;
The hills swung open to the light;

Through their green gates the sunshine shewed;
A long, faint splendour downward flowed.

Down glade, and glen, and bank it rolled:
It bridged the shaded stream with gold.

And, borne on piers of mist, allied
The shadowy with the sunlit side!

"So," prayed we, "when our feet draw near
The river, dark with mortal fear,

And the night cometh, chill with dew,
O Father! let Thy light break through!"

So let the hills of doubt divide,
So bridge with faith the sunless tide!

So let the eyes that fail on earth
On Thy eternal hills look forth;

And, in Thy beckoning angels, know
The dear ones whom we loved below!"

John G. Whittier.

THE SOCIAL PRAYER MEETING.

The importance of the weekly meeting for prayer is no longer a matter of dispute in any of our churches. Experience has shewn its immense value. It is not only the thermometer which indicates the spiritual temperature of the church, but if rightly used, it is also a most important instrument in securing and maintaining a proper degree of spiritual warmth. The only question is, How shall the prayer meeting be conducted so as to make it most useful to the church? This is the problem with many a pastor which he has laboured for years to solve, but in vain. In many cases the weekly meeting for prayer is sparsely attended; its services formal and monotonous, and the few who come confess that they do so from a sense of duty and not from any realized profit or delight. Others again confess that they have had only a partial success in this service and are almost driven to envy those who can tell of crowded, lively and enjoyable services.

In looking for helps in this direction it is well to consider first of all the hindrances to success, for

often the only help we need is to know and correct mistakes.

There are certain things that tend to kill prayer meetings. Long and formal prayers, and long and windy exhortations, that are born of little thought and feeling, must be avoided. The meeting must not be too long. One hour is sufficient. Let it be begun promptly and ended at the exact time. If the leader comes unprepared, reads long hymns and long portions of Scripture to fill up the time and conceal his lack of preparation, the meeting will soon drag.

It is a great mistake also to make this social meeting a copy of the Sabbath day service. The latter is the public formal worship of God, while the former has special reference to the social life of the church. Bad preaching is uninteresting and unprofitable anywhere. If the minister wishes to make this work-day meeting a preaching service, let him come thoroughly prepared for it. But if it is designed for prayer, and for developing the gifts of the brethren, and for mutual edification, let him aim specially at this end.

Some have made this service a social gathering for the study of the Scriptures, and with much profit and interest to all. Others make it a conference concerning the needs and labours of the church, accompanied with much fervent prayer. The latter has, in general, been the most successful method. It has many advantages, and among them this. It interests all by giving each one something to do. But it requires much care and discretion for its proper conduct. The subject of conferences should be announced beforehand and parties seen privately who will take some appropriate part in the services. Those who cannot speak or pray in public, can answer questions or carry invitations to others, or present requests for prayer. All should sing, and the singing should be of the very best that can be provided. The meeting must be social in its character. It is the family meeting of the church, and each should give his brother a cordial greeting.

Much depends also upon the spirit in which the members come to these services. Those who come prayerfully and expecting a blessing, will not fail to find delight and profit. But when they assemble without thought or desire, carried thither by the currents of habit; when they sit dull, stupid and tired, as if it was the duty of the leader to entertain and stir them up or thaw them out by his red hot earnestness, what wonder that the prayer meeting becomes uninteresting? The divine rule is, "edify one another in love." Build each other up in love, and when love works and all work in love, there will be interest, profit and enjoyment.

THE WORK THAT LASTS.

Chalmers lives to-day in the Free Kirk of Scotland. Franke is still giving homes to orphans; and Howard's hand is still purifying prisons. John Bunyan helps me towards heaven every day, William Cowper sings in our prayer meeting continually, "There is a fountain filled with blood." Charles Hodge preaches every Sabbath in scores of American pulpits. Their works do follow them. Such work will outlast the Pyramids. Not merely the noble deeds of these conspicuous saints and benefactors will endure; but every faithful word and every godly act of every honest Christian, even the humblest and obscurest, will link itself with Almighty strength, and "abide for ever." Brethren and sisters in Christ, this is the sum and substance of true religion, it is just the doing of God's will. Not my will or yours, but the will of Him who created and redeemed us. While we are doing this every day, we are building up the solid piers on which our eternal hopes shall rest. No strain of temptation, or over-loaded trains of cares can ever break them down. Death will not disturb them. God Himself writes on them, "He that doeth My will abideth for ever."—Dr. Cuyler.

A BILL for enabling the authorities of Knox College to confer the degrees of B.D. and D.D. is at present before the Local Legislature, and will in due course become law without, it is understood, the slightest appearance of opposition.

COUNT MAFFEI, Secretary-General of the Italian ministry of foreign affairs, has completely satisfied the Austrian ambassador at Rome in regard to the movements of the Italia Irredenta Party, which has been said to be contemplating an invasion of Austria.